

THE
ORIGINAL
OF THE
MINIATURE.

A Novel.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

By SELINA DAVENPORT,

*AUTHOR OF THE HYPOCRITE, OR MODERN JANUS, THE SONS OF
THE VISCOUNT AND DAUGHTERS OF THE EARL, DONALD
MONTEITH, &c. &c.*

"Too faithful heart! thou never canst retrieve
Thy wither'd hopes: conceal the cruel pain;
O'er thy lost treasure still in silence grieve,
But never to the unfeeling ear complain:
From fruitless struggles dearly bought refrain,
Submit it once—the bitter task is sign,
Nor watch and find the expiring flame in vain."

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THE
Original of the Miniature.

CHAPTER I.

THE curiosity of lord de Morville was strongly excited, as he came nearer and nearer to the dwelling which had been, from infancy, the residence of his sister. He wondered if she was tall or short, brown or fair; or if she bore any resemblance to his mother, of whom he still retained a faint remembrance. Could he do otherwise than remember her, when each succeeding day had brought with it fresh instances of maternal fondness? When he lost his mother, he was not old enough

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to be aware of the extent of his misfortune, but he was old enough to feel the deprivation of her society, and to lament bitterly that he no longer saw her—no longer received her tender caresses.

The parental kindness of his father seemed to be awakened by this event; he dried the tears of his little son, kept him always with him, and banished from his sight every thing which could remind him of his doting mother. It was not, however, so easy to erase her from the young heart of her boy; the shrubs she had planted, the poor she had visited, the animals she had petted, all concurred to call forth the ready tears of the child; and his father, in consequence, removed with him to the seaside, after he had first consigned to the care of a total stranger his infant sister. A tutor of the first classical endowments was procured for the young lord Sedley; no expence was spared, either upon his education or his wishes; and after an absence of five years, lord de Morville

ville returned to de Morville Castle, where he continued principally to reside until his death.

That the mind of his son might not be subject to a revival of painful ideas, his lordship had refused to renew to his tenants their leases, so that his cottages and farms were new-peopled, and the whole of his household was also changed.

Youth is the season of delight, the May of life; and the buoyant spirits of lord Sedley never allowed him to dwell long upon any thing not connected, in some way or other, with his own pleasurable pursuits; the only restriction he was under, was in the number and choice of his companions. In this lord de Morville was rigidly particular; but that his son might not always be confined to the society of his tutor, he took under his protection two nephews, the children of a deceased sister, whose husband was a captain in the army. With these youths

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lord Sedley contrived to pass his time happily ; the remembrance of his mother was nearly obliterated, and he knew not that he had a sister in existence, until within a few hours of his father's decease. The letter of Mrs. Meredith confirmed the assertion of the late earl de Morville. The young lord accordingly felt disposed to pay an immediate visit to her cottage, and would have done so, had he not passed his word solemnly to his cousin, to render him every personal assistance in an affair in which the peace and happiness of his relation were intimately concerned.

The first moment that he found himself free from this engagement, he set off for Mrs. Meredith's abode, and felt some degree of vexation at not finding either the old lady or his sister at home. Ordering his carriage and servants to wait, he dispatched a note to Virginia, informing her of his arrival, and then sat down to amuse himself with the piano, secretly hoping that

that his sister possessed sufficient knowledge of the science to enable her to perform with tolerable execution.

Lord de Morville's fancy conjured up a variety of forms, all of which, in succession, he imagined to be that of his sister, yet none pleased him; they partook of a certain rustic inelegance, which he deemed inseparable from a country education, and which he felt would sit with particular awkwardness on the daughter of an earl.

A carriage stopped at the door of the cottage, and a voice of peculiar benevolence met his ear.—“ Ben, desire that the luggage of lord de Morville may be brought in. I cannot think of his lordship going any further than my cottage, and I only regret that he did not feel sufficiently at home to give the same orders himself.”

The next instant Mrs. Meredith entered, followed by a youthful form, full of grace and sweetness.—“ My brother! my

dear brother!" exclaimed Virginia, and sprang into his arms.

Lord de Morville pressed her affectionately to his bosom. Pride, pleasure, and fraternal love, by turns filled his heart, and sparkled in his fine dark eyes. He kissed away the tear which trembled on the crimson cheek of his sister; and then, turning towards Mrs. Meredith, he gave way, in the most eloquent terms, to his feelings, at once delighting the old lady and Virginia by the display of his gratitude, and the acknowledgment of his satisfaction in beholding his sister the being that she was.

"I feel myself more than repaid, my lord, by your approving condescension," said Mrs. Meredith. "as well as by the kindness of heart and good disposition of your sister. What I at first considered as a duty, has since become a pleasure, which is greatly enhanced by the conviction that she will not disgrace the noble family of which,

which, I hope, she will shortly become a member."

"It shall be my study, my dear madam," replied his lordship, "from this hour, to prove to you my sense of the obligation which is due to you for the maternal part you have acted, and to promote the welfare and happiness of my sister, as far as lies in my power. In a fortnight I mean to return to de Morville Castle, whither I shall hope to be accompanied by you, my dear madam, and my dearest sister."

"We will settle that point to-morrow," cried Mrs. Meredith; "but the question now is, will your lordship, to oblige me, retire to the chamber which by this time is got ready for you: and after making whatever alteration you may think proper in your dress, return with us to Mrs. Glendore's, who commissioned me to ask you to make one at her supper-table? You will there see the chief of our neighbouring families, and be introduced to

some of the best people in the world, as well as friends who are highly interested in the fate of my little girl."

"With all my soul," said lord de Morville gaily, at the same time kissing the cheek of Virginia, whose heart bounded to her lips at the touch of his.

In a few minutes her brother was ready to attend them; and in a few minutes more Virginia found herself in the ball-room of Meredith House. What then were her sensations, as, leaning on the arm of her BROTHER, she presented him separately to the once-idolized friends of her childhood—as she contemplated, with breathless rapture, the effect his noble and dignified presence had on them—as she turned her joyful eyes on him whose manly and beautiful exterior promised a soul equally beautiful? Scarce able to restrain her delight, she impatiently led him forward. She had yet to introduce him to the Herberts and to Winifred.

At the bottom of the dance stood Arthur

thur and her amiable friend, whom he had purposely selected, that he might speak of her who dwelt most in his mind. His quick eye caught a glimpse of Virginia, leaning on her newly-recovered brother. Happiness the most pure and perfect illumined her features, and rendered them even more lovely than usual. She looked, she moved, a creature of the other world. The brother of Virginia had a claim on the heart of Herbert, whose hand was instinctively extended, and as readily grasped by that of de Morville; the same feelings, the same ideas, appeared to occupy them both; they were not, they could not be, strangers to each other.

Winifred Meredith blushed deeply, and looked embarrassed, when introduced by Virginia to her brother; yet Winifred had never seen lord de Morville, or heard the silvery sounds of his voice before. By consent she and her partner retired from the dance, to seek, in the adjoining rooms, Mrs. Herbert and Dorinda.

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Lord de Morville offered his arm to Winifred, who tremblingly accepted it, on seeing Virginia take that of Mr. Herbert; he even asked her to favour him with her hand after supper, to which she also consented, to the no small pleasure of Virginia, who felt highly gratified that her affectionate and steady friend had been thus publicly noticed and preferred by her brother—an honour which she knew would not escape the observation of some of the Glendores.

In the refreshment-room they perceived Miss Herbert and Reuben Glendore. The former no sooner beheld his lordship than she recognised him as one of the graceful strangers whom she had seen in the ruins of — Abbey. Lord de Morville also had not forgotten her; in fact, they seemed mutually pleased with each other. There was, independent of a person handsome and elegant, a something about lord de Morville that women in general admire. The fire of his eye bespoke the hero—the
tone

tone of enthusiasm with which he dwelt on the noble and heroic deeds of his brave countrymen, gave to his conversation an air of romantic ardour, which never failed to interest those who listened to him; while the sympathy which he imagined that he felt for their misfortunes, and his readiness to oblige, when it did not interfere with his own personal gratifications, made him a favourite of both old and young. Dorinda felt an immediate prepossession in his favour, which she failed not to impart on the first opportunity to Reuben, who generously exulted in the probability there now appeared of Virginia's securing to herself the protection of a brother, who, if looks might be relied on, bade fair to make amends for the unnatural conduct of his father.

For an instant the flush of happiness quitted the cheek of Virginia, when informed by Marian that, during her absence, Mrs. Herbert had left the room from indisposition; but it soon returned,

as she added that the invalid had commissioned her to tell her ladyship that she would call on her in the morning.

Marian whispered her congratulations on the bliss thus bestowed on her friend by the unexpected presence of lord de Morville—"Dearest Virginia," said the affectionate girl, as she pressed with energy the hand she loved, "may you find in your brother's society and tenderness, in his counsels and protection, a solace for the deprivation you have suffered in the loss of your parent's affection! Lord de Morville *looks* incapable of acting otherwise than kindly; he has at moments a resemblance to you, which is sufficient to guarantee to him my regard."

"Ah!" replied Virginia, returning with equal warmth the pressure of Marian's soft hand, "that you had but a heart to bestow, my Marian, and that my brother were worthy of it!"

"Hush!" exclaimed Marian expressively, while a tear, far removed from that of pleasure

pleasure, started into her heavenly blue eye, “that is a subject on which I must command your silence—you do not wish to be my sister.” Marian was out of sight in an instant.

At any other time such a hint would have damped for the night the spirits of Virginia, but now she could only think of her brother—she scarce saw any other being but him; or if she did, that being was Arthur Herbert, who sat next her at the supper-table, and who remained near her during the remainder of the ball, talking of lord de Morville—the only subject which at that time would have been grateful to her ear.

Although all the Glendores, not even excepting the mistress of the mansion, had paid to lord de Morville every flattering attention, yet Mrs. Meredith, offended in particular by the maternal fears of Mrs. Glendore, and the ungenerous behaviour of Alicia, could not help imparting to his lordship, after her young charge had retired

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“Virginia must follow my example,” replied his lordship, “and let prudence, more than inclination, govern her in the choice of a husband. She is by far the prettiest

prettiest girl I have yet seen, and it would be a shame if she were to fling herself away."

"Why, I think so, really," cried Mrs. Meredith. "I have done my best to render her both amiable and accomplished, and I hope have succeeded. Your countenance and protection, my lord, will do much towards her future establishment. She is very dear to me, and in time will become so to you."

"No doubt of it, my dear madam. Virginia seems born to excite affection. Reared and educated by you, she cannot fail to be estimable. Her vivacity will enliven the solitude of de Morville Castle, as often as I am obliged to reside there. I hope also that you will honour us with your presence, and that Miss Meredith will accompany her friend. I should like much to make a party, for the time that it is necessary for me to stay in order to arrange my father's affairs, but I feel too deeply the insult offered to my sister to invite
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any of the Caendores. May I, however, reckon upon you and your lovely niece?"

Mrs. Meredith assured him that she would most willingly agree to any thing which could forward the happiness of Virginia, or add to his pleasures, and they parted for the night—lord de Morville secretly pleased by the ready acquiescence of the rich old dowager, and she equally delighted by the prospect of managing him and his fortune, and, perhaps, matching him to her little dark-eyed Winny, without, however, any idea of giving her a single guinea for her wedding-portion.

It was in vain that she tried to sleep away the fatigues of the evening. Her head was too full of economy and savingness to allow of repose. Plan succeeded plan, till at length she resolved to let her cottage for the time she expected to be absent, and with it her poultry, pigs, cows, &c. determining to have a handsome allowance made her for the use of them. Her coachman and footman, with one of her

her young women, she should take with her; but the old housekeeper must remain to watch the proceedings of whatever family might become inmates of her house, and to see that strict justice was done in the absence of her mistress. If she could not persuade Virginia to take the other female servant as her maid, she meant to try and get her into the service of lady Lambton; for to put her on board wages would be a most extravagant way of wasting money.

Virginia, meanwhile, was enjoying the sweetest slumbers. Visions of delight floated across her mind, of which her brother, Mrs. Herbert, and Arthur, formed the principal subjects. She awoke cheerful and happy, and hastened to receive the fraternal embrace of lord de Morville, who, with all the gallantry of polished life, kissed the hand of the blushing Winifred, and repeated his wish that she would accompany her aunt to de Morville Castle—a proposal which made the heart of Winifred

fred beat quicker than usual; nor were its throbbings silenced by the caresses of Virginia, and the consent of Mrs. Meredith. It might be said that Winifred was predisposed to esteem lord de Morville, even before she had seen him; but now that she beheld in him not only the likeness of her highly-valued Virginia, but the guardian and protector of that beloved friend, the sentiment to which his presence gave birth was of a warmer nature; and poor Winifred, who had hitherto known love only by name, was no longer a stranger to its emotions.

Mrs. Herbert came according to her promise. Virginia ran out to meet her, and to conduct her to her brother—"Oh, my dear madam," she cried, "I am so happy! lord de Morville is arrived, and appears disposed to return all my tenderness. You know not how disappointed I felt in not being able to introduce him to you last night."

"I was taken suddenly indisposed, my love,"

love," replied Mrs. Herbert, "and am very far from well even now; but I would not break my word."

By this time they had reached the house. Mrs. Herbert stopped for a moment—she trembled, and seemed to breathe with difficulty—"Ah, you are indeed unwell?" exclaimed Virginia, in a tone of alarm; "I fear your kind attention to me will increase it. Why did you come unattended?"

"Arthur will call for me," replied Mrs. Herbert, a little recovered from her agitation. "He would have accompanied me, but that I would not allow him to leave Alicia Glendore, who had requested him to read a new play. I am better now, my dear girl; let us proceed."

Lord de Morville was standing near the door as they entered. Never had a form of greater interest met his sight than that of Mrs. Herbert, who, leaning on the arm of Virginia, appeared almost fainting from excessive weakness. Without waiting to be
be

he introduced, he instantly offered her his assistance to support her to a seat ; nor did he then quit her, but drawing his chair close to hers, paid her every tender attention, until he saw that she was perfectly recovered.

Lord de Morville was not one of those who are misled by first impressions. It was seldom that he suffered himself to be governed by the impulse of the moment, unless that impulse was to gratify his own pleasures. Education, and the counsels of his father, had made him selfish, and narrowed his heart, which was by nature generous and affectionate; they had taught him to sacrifice all private feelings to the increase of his fortune, which was by far too limited for his rank ; and as the early lessons of his father had been to guard against the fascination of female loveliness, and to select a wife more for her wealth than for her beauty, that the ancient splendour of the family might be restored to its original lustre, his lordship
had

had endeavoured to conform to the wishes of his parent; and whenever he found himself in danger of yielding to first impressions, put an immediate check upon his feelings, by calling to mind the advice of his father.

In this instance, however, he found himself hurried on, as if by a secret charm. He had felt the power of youthful beauty, and had restrained the tumultuous wishes of his own bosom, but never had he been so completely taken by surprise as in his first introduction to Mrs. Herbert. Lord de Morville could not analyse the nature of his feelings. He smiled at the transient supposition that a woman between six and seven and thirty, weakened by a long residence in the climate of the East, and evidently far from happy, though possessing all the means of acquiring happiness in this life, should have made not only a lasting impression on his mind, but have effaced a form of changeful sweetness, of varying grace, which, in spite of reason, seemed

seemed to cling to his heart, and to fill every part of it.

No, it was not love—it was an indefinable something that seemed to attract him to Mrs. Herbert as soon as he beheld her. Nor did she appear less under the same mysterious influence. He saw that her bright blue eyes were occasionally humid, as they wandered fearfully, yet anxiously, over his figure—as they rested on his countenance, as if trying to trace out a resemblance, perhaps, to some dear lost friend or relative; and he felt, after passing an hour in her society, that all the prudent cautions of his father were vain, for that he had decidedly yielded to a first impression, and allowed himself to feel an interest in the future fate of a stranger, which no circumstance or time could diminish.

Mrs. Herbert gradually became more tranquil. She conversed with ease upon a variety of topics, all of which were evidently chosen to enable lord de Morville to display the powers of his mind, his
taste

taste and eloquence. She seemed satisfied with the trial, and then changed the conversation to the delight which his lordship must feel on recovering such a sister as Virginia.

To do lord de Morville justice, he felt every inclination to love and to promote the welfare of Virginia, to the utmost of his abilities. Notwithstanding his acquired selfishness, and the narrowness of his income, he determined that she should share it with him; and never perhaps had he appeared to greater advantage than at the moment when, in replying to Mrs. Herbert, every handsome feature of his face was animated by interest for her, and affection for his sister.

The arrival of Arthur with Alicia Glendore put an end to a conversation in which each individual, not excepting Mrs. Meredith, felt gratified. The open brow of lord de Morville clouded at the approach of Alicia, but it cleared as he pressed with friendly warmth the hand of Herbert.

Alicia

Alicia came to invite Mrs. Meredith and her family to dinner the next day. His lordship, coldly bowing, suffered himself to be included in the invitation.

“Virginia,” said Alicia, turning gaily towards her, “I have good news for you—your beau is returned before the appointed time. We met sir James Lambton’s travelling equipage just as we were within sight of the cottage. Lady Lambton is to be one of our party to-morrow, and sir James and his sister have just come back in time to enable us to have a musical treat. But you will see him, of course, to-day.”

“I shall always be glad to see sir James, or any of his family,” replied Virginia, with a look and voice which all present understood. “They have behaved to me with the same kindness and attention as if I had been proclaimed heiress of several thousands a-year. Could I forget such conduct, I should be indeed an ingrate.”

“That is true, my dear sister,” said
lord

lord de Morville, gravely. "I am pleased to find that you are able to estimate the true value of *disinterested* friendship; but I must not have any lovers, Virginia, unless sanctioned first by me."

"I am glad to hear that," cried Mrs. Meredith; "such a declaration will silence all improper advances. However, if sir James Lambton is actually what Miss Alicia has *good-naturally* termed him, the beau of our Virginia, he has only to follow her to de Morville Castle, and lay his credentials at the feet of her brother."

"De Morville Castle!" repeated Alicia, in surprise; "surely, my lord, you are not going to rob us of our sweet friend's society, to immure her within the walls of de Morville Castle."

"I hope to be there in less than a fortnight," said his lordship, "and to carry with me my sister and her maternal friend, as well as her amiable companion, Miss Meredith; but it is far from my intention

to immure her within the walls of my castle. On the contrary, we shall pass our Christmas in London; she will then be introduced to her uncle and cousins, who are already desirous of showing her every kindness."

Alicia appeared thoughtful; then, turning suddenly to Virginia, said—"Well, my dear friend, I must not selfishly regret a separation which will be productive of so much good to yourself, especially as it will not be a long one; for mamma means to go to town this year earlier than usual. We shall therefore have the pleasure of meeting with you there."

"I hope so," exclaimed Virginia, while a vexatious tear started into her eye. "Marian and I have been so constantly together, that my thoughts will often wander to these scenes of our early pleasures."

"Carry but your *heart* with you, my sister," said his lordship, "and I shall not blame you for allowing your *mind* to
range

range at will with one whose appearance seems to warrant most fully all your affection."

This tribute, paid by her brother to the virtues of Marian, delighted Virginia. She could not refrain from throwing her arms round his neck, and, embracing him affectionately, replied—"Ah, my brother! if you knew but half the value of my Marian's heart, you would love her as dearly as I do."

Mrs. Herbert now rose to take leave, when Virginia, for the first time, noticed the melancholy expression of her son's countenance as he pressed her hand on wishing her good morning. "Are you not well, Mr. Herbert?" she inquired in a tender voice.

"Perfectly so," was his reply; but Virginia felt the difference between the look of last night and the look of the morning, and knew immediately that something had discomposed him.

As Alicia had predicted, sir James and

his sisters paid a visit to the cottage, where they were easily prevailed on to stay tea. The conversation of de Morville, and his elegant person, delighted the Miss Lambtons, while their brother, though much pleased with his lordship, saw little else beside Virginia.

CHAPTER II.

THE melancholy which clouded the handsome features of Arthur Herbert was, as Virginia conjectured, more owing to vexation than to bodily illness. Alicia had watched all his movements at the ball, and, from the tenderness of his voice and eyes, too plainly discovered how little hope she had of ever becoming his wife.

For a moment she felt conquered, and by whom? By the little girl whose walks were confined to the neighbouring town,

town, and whose knowledge of the world was only gathered by her intercourse with herself and family. It was by her whom she had loved for so long a time, but who now seemed born to disappoint her in all her plans and expectations. In proportion as she had once loved Virginia, she now became the object of her dislike. To be foiled by one who was a mere novice in fashionable life, was not to be borne; yet openly to be her enemy, would draw down on herself the reproaches of all but her mother. To retaliate and avenge herself on Virginia, must be done by continuing to wear the semblance of regard—to point out her failings to Herbert, with all the gentle pity of a friend—to gain his confidence, and destroy what she yet hoped was only a transient passion, excited by the grace and loveliness of Virginia.

To effect this as soon as possible, Alicia next morning assumed one of her most captivating looks, and, in a voice of reproachful sweetness, requested him, if he

was not pre-engaged, to read a new play to her and Dorinda. Miss Herbert was as little inclined to favour Virginia as was Alicia; not that she now looked upon her as a rival, but because she knew that she was held in high estimation by her mother and Arthur; she even fancied (for what will not a diseased imagination suggest?) that they both felt in secret more tenderness for lady Virginia Sedley than they did for her, and this painful idea was sufficient to obscure every good quality of the favourite, and to make her odious in the sight of Dorinda.

Miss Herbert was the first to start the subject so much desired by Alicia. Arthur had no sooner finished reading than she noticed the singularity of lord de Morville being the stranger they had seen in the ruins of — Abbey. He pleased her taste, and she therefore spoke of him in terms of approbation.

“ You seem, my dear friend,” said Alicia, “ to have formed a right estimate of
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the character of lord de Morville. I feel inclined to esteem him highly. Indeed, as the brother of Virginia, he has a strong claim to my regard, did I not fear," she added, with a sigh, "that, like her, he would soon learn to slight my affection."

"I think otherwise," replied Dorinda, warmly. "There is a something in the countenance and manner of lord de Morville that makes me feel inclined to become his advocate. I confess that his sister is very pretty, but really, my dearest Alicia, I have never been able to find out what it was that made all the female part of your family so fond of her; nay, I believe that Reuben at one time was seized with the same mania."

Herbert, who appeared to be making memorandums, now became all attention.

"No being could have been more dear to us than Virginia once was," replied Alicia, lowering her voice, yet not so low but that he could hear. "Once, do I say! Nay she is still dear to us. Would to

Heaven that I could affirm we were as dear to her! Oh, my Dorinda, you know not the pain I suffer in being compelled thus to expose to you the failings of my early friend, or else to allow you to think that the change in our opinions proceeds from caprice. You may judge of the excess of our affection for Virginia, when I tell you that it was the chief wish of my heart, as well as of my sisters, to see her one day become the wife of our idolized Reuben. In spite of the mystery which hung over her birth, we looked forward to this event with rapture."

"But did your brother do the same?" cried Dorinda, hastily interrupting her.

"Our wishes were his," continued Alicia. "He had been accustomed to associate with Virginia from a boy, and to hear her name always connected with his own. If, however, his heart acknowledged the power of her beauty, her fatal vanity and want of thought upon a late occasion emancipated him from her chains.

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They gave my brother his freedom, and opened our eyes to the imperfections of a being whom we had foolishly deemed faultless."

Dorinda felt reassured. "You may, with safety, my dear Alicia," said she, "confide to my brother and myself what has thus called forth your tears. Arthur seems to have been as much duped by the exterior of lady Virginia as yourself, and I shall feel infinitely obliged to you if you will, if possible, undeceive him."

Arthur closed his pocket-book in silence, yet to Alicia his manner seemed most eloquent.—"Oh Heaven!" she cried, turning on him her eyes, full of tears of well-dissembled grief, "I had forgotten that Mr. Herbert was present. Ah, my friend!" and she extended towards him her beautiful white hand, "think not I would seek to lessen the opinion you have formed of Virginia! Experience may teach her wisdom—may make her worthy, I hope, of *your* esteem."

Herbert pressed the hand of Alicia in his as he placed himself by her side.—“To be admitted into your confidence,” said he, “is an honour I did not indeed expect. Believe me, however, that I feel too much interested in your distress not to assure you that the cause of it shall never escape my lips. But may I not plead for your lovely friend? Surely, Alicia, she cannot have sinned beyond forgiveness.”

“Had she only sinned against me,” replied Alicia, with a softened accent, “my own heart would have been her pleader; but when I saw that she trifled with the peace and happiness of my brother, I felt that the duties of a sister were more sacred than those of a friend. Educated with the strictest rules of economy, and secluded from mixing with any family but my own, the real character of Virginia was unknown to us. We judged of what would be the steadiness of her conjugal affection, from that which she testified for her female associates. Bred up under the
eye

eye of Mrs. Meredith, she had no opportunity to display the weak vanity of a little mind, and the haughtiness of her nature was kept down by the mystery which hovered over all that concerned her connexions. At a ball given by my mother on her birthday, Mrs. Meredith allowed her to be introduced, for the first time, to the notice of the neighbouring families; it was then that the unhappy weakness of the being I thought perfect was betrayed to me. No longer restricted to the simple garb worn by her and Winifred Meredith, Virginia appeared dressed with studied care, and ornamented with a profusion of pearls. She certainly looked most lovely. My heart swelled with affection and pride, as I said to myself—‘This is the betrothed of my Reuben; this is our dear sister.’ What then were my feelings on beholding her totally disregardless of my brother! She seemed to think only of herself, and of the homage paid to her beauty by sir James

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Lambton,

Lambton, who attached himself to her the whole of the night. My brother felt deeply mortified by her conduct, and left us the next morning; nor did they meet again until he came down accompanied by you."

"Indeed! are you sure of that?" inquired Dorinda fearfully.

"As sure as that no trace remains of his first attachment. The discovery of her real situation in life was made known to her the next day by Mrs. Meredith. Our hearts were inclined to overlook her misconduct; we thought only of the unnatural cruelty of her father, and of the painful state of dependancy to which he had consigned her. My mother, who had always regarded her as a daughter, advised and reasoned with her upon her past and future behaviour; but Virginia's high spirit could not brook what she foolishly considered as an insult—she replied to my mother with acrimony and bitterness. A coldness has ever since remained between
them,

them, nor will time, I am well convinced, have power to reconcile them to each other."

"Well, that is strange!" cried Dorinda, musing. "I should not have supposed that any woman who had once been the object of Mr. Glendore's affection could be brought so readily to relinquish him."

"Neither could I have believed," replied Herbert, "that any man who once loved lady Virginia Selley, and who had been so happy as to be received as her destined husband, could so easily recover his freedom, or so quietly give up the glory of possessing her, for a fault, which, though reprehensible, was certainly not criminal."

"Well then, we will suppose," said Alicia, "that neither of them were under the influence of a romantic passion. Yet my fears remain the same. I judge of the character and principles of Virginia from the levity of a night, and I predict that she is incapable of returning the love
which

which I am willing to allow she so is well calculated to inspire."

"Oh! say not so," cried Arthur, hastily. "You have uttered a libel on Nature, who, having formed her from its choicest materials, forgot to bestow on her a heart worthy the fabric which enshrines it."

"No," said Alicia, sighing deeply, "Virginia is not heartless, neither is she incapable of great and generous actions; but she has no settled rule for her conduct; she is swayed by the impulse of the moment, and suffers herself to be governed by the first impression which persons or things make on her mind. She would be easily led, were it not for the hastiness of her temper, which takes alarm at every fancied slight. Oh, no! Virginia is not heartless; but the love of admiration, the desire of conquest, will prompt her to neglect the opportunity of securing to herself a faithful heart; her friends, tired of her eternal thoughtlessness, will drop off one by one; and should she ever feel
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the power of love, it will only be to know its tortures—her own misconduct will preclude her from tasting of its felicities.”

“ Oh, gracious Heaven!” exclaimed Herbert, with a shudder of horror, “ what a picture, my dear friend, have you drawn! what a fate have you foretold for the companion of your childhood! Will not you yourself endeavour to avert the evils you have predicted?”

“ Alas!” replied Alicia, wiping away her tears, “ Virginia is deaf to the warning voice of friendship; she is elated by the novelty of her rank, and the change in her appearance, as well as by the prospect of mixing with the world, and of becoming, I fear, one of the votaries of fashion. This winter will decide the happiness of Virginia.”

Reuben now entered to ask Miss Herbert if she would ride with him to the Lambtons, and Arthur, remembering that he had to call at the cottage, proposed that

that Alicia should walk there, and be the bearer of her mother's invitation.

The prophetic words of Virginia's early friend sunk deep into the mind of Herbert; not that he was superstitious enough to place any faith in the prophecy, yet it pained him to know that the original of the miniature, so solemnly confided to his care by his deceased father, should have given cause, though a trifling one, to have so severe a censure passed on her by the friend of her youth. Were every heart like his, what mortal would not glory in contributing to the peace and felicity of Virginia! where would there be found one base enough to take advantage of any weakness she might discover!

Such were the reflections of Arthur after his return from Meredith cottage. On retiring to his chamber, he, as if by instinct, unlocked the secret drawer of his desk, and taking from it the letter and the miniature, once more perused the dying wish

wish of his father. The only conclusion he could draw from it was, indeed, a painful one, since it not only cast an indelible stain on the memory of a beloved parent, but threatened materially to injure his own peace. The confession of his father could admit but of one construction; it placed him in the light of a seducer—the seducer of the countess de Morville! and Virginia, in all probability, was his sister. Herbert sickened as the idea seemed to impress itself more firmly on his mind. To be related to Virginia, in spite of the prediction of Alicia, would be the height of his ambition, but not as a brother. The relationship he coveted was of a more tender nature; it united in one all the endearing ties which bind mankind to existence. It was as the husband, not as the brother of Virginia, that Herbert wished to fulfil the last request of his father.

The miniature was next examined, as if it contained some hidden clue to unravel the mystery which hung over it. No
secret

secret spring, however, appeared. It was set in plain gold, evidently with an intention to be worn. Herbert fastened it round his neck by a piece of black ribbon, and, pressing the inanimate ivory to his lips, could not repress a mental prayer that the lovely original might still be the daughter of lord de Morville, and that time and circumstances would effectually efface the blot which at present darkened the fame and honour of his parent. Still Herbert felt that, in whatever point of view he must consider Virginia, she would always be the object of his care. Whatever failings she might possess, she would continue dear to him, and in whatever situation she was placed, it should be his study to watch over her with all the delicacy of fraternal affection.

“To what,” he exclaimed, “am I to attribute the singularity of my feelings on first beholding the original of this miniature?—or, what is still more incomprehensible, that indescribable something which

which eternally floats across my mind, and which, in spite of reason and common sense, persists in connecting the form of lord de Morville with those scenes of early life which I would give part of my existence to be able to trace more plainly!"

It was equally strange that the father of Arthur seemed to have foreseen that the happiness of his son would be deeply involved in the fate of the lovely original of the miniature. It was true that he had given him permission to apply in that case to Mr. Glendore; but this Arthur resolved to avoid doing till he was compelled to it as a last resource. It might yet be possible to discover the cause of the late lord de Morville's unnatural conduct towards his daughter, by means less painful to the feelings of Herbert than being obliged to seek an explanation from the confidant of his father.

If, indeed, in a moment of fatal and unguarded weakness, that still-venerated parent had violated the laws of God and
man,

man, and seduced the countess de Morville from her duty, what had become of her? Might she not still be living, and be in want of that protection and assistance which had been so solemnly requested for her child? His father had not mentioned *her*, she must therefore have ceased to exist on earth, since she had done so in the mind of his father. The claim of Virginia—of her lovely, neglected orphan, was now more deeply felt by Arthur than ever. “In future,” said he, “I will endeavour to think of her only as a sister. All selfish consideration shall be banished from my thoughts. Alicia Glendore’s prediction will be false; for one faithful heart at least she will possess—one friend that will cling to her through life, and, in spite of the malice and envy of the world, will share with her the last guinea that he has.”

Notwithstanding this Platonic resolution of Arthur Herbert, his better genius seemed to inspire him with the hope that Virginia might still be the daughter of
lord

lord de Morville, and he met her at dinner next day, if not with a happy countenance, at least with a cheerful one. He soon noticed the cold and distant civility of her brother towards all the Glendores, except Marian, and was at a loss to divine the cause, until Alicia, whispering, said—“Alas, my dear friend! I little imagined that the heart of Virginia was capable of prejudicing that of lord de Morville against the friends of her childhood. The hauteur and freezing politeness of his behaviour to our family too fully justify my suspicions.”

Herbert knew not what excuse to frame for de Morville, since he could not himself attribute it to any other motive than proud indignation for the insult his sister had received, in particular from Mrs. Glendore. To the rest of the company he was affable and attractive, but the greatest part of his discourse, as well as his attentions, were divided between Mrs. Herbert and Winifred Meredith.

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When the cloth was removed, and the ladies had withdrawn, Reuben, who, in the absence of Mr. Glendore, had done the honours of the table, gave as a toast the health of Miss Herbert. The penetrating eyes of lord de Morville met his as he raised the glass to his lips. The conscious blush betrayed the wavering of Reuben's mind. His lordship felt a kindred sympathy as he witnessed his emotion, and from that hour became his friend. He loves my sister, thought lord de Morville, but duty and interest overcome his private inclinations.

When Herbert was called upon by Glendore, he gave "lady Virginia Sedley."

"You are beforehand with me, Mr. Herbert," cried sir James Lambton, good-naturedly, "but I am too much pleased, in being introduced to the brother of her ladyship, to feel any inclination to say more than that you could not have given a toast more consonant to my sincere prayers than the health, and, allow me to
add,

add, the happiness of lady Virginia Sedley."

"In her name, and in my own, I thank you, gentlemen," replied lord de Morville, offering each a hand, while his features were rendered handsomer by the fascinating smile which illumined them. "Through all the scenes of my future life I shall remember the village of —— with delight. It was here I first embraced a long estranged sister, who bids fair to be the pride of my heart; and it was here that I became acquainted with those who, I shall allow myself to hope, will henceforward be ranked among my friends." He bowed gracefully round the table. "In the course of a few days," he continued, "I shall return to de Morville Castle; but, as I mean to pass my Christmas in London, I flatter myself we shall all meet again, with the same friendly feelings towards each other as now."

The gentlemen all replied that they
should

should look forward to the time with the sincerest pleasure. "My stay at de Morville Castle will probably not exceed a month," said his lordship. "If I could persuade any or all of you to accompany me, my sister's first entrance into the castle of her ancestors would, I am certain, be doubly gratifying."

Sir James most truly regretted that, from family reasons, he was obliged to decline an invitation so agreeable to his wishes, as did also Reuben Glendore, who reassured lord de Morville that he should look forward to the approaching winter with fresh satisfaction. "If you love mirth, my lord," said he, "I shall be able to introduce you to three or four high-spirited fellows like myself, who think life too uncertain and too short not to make it pass as pleasantly as we can."

"I thank you," cried his lordship, "and accept your offer. In the mean time, Mr. Glendore, believe that, independent
of

of your own merits, the early friend and companion of my sister will ever be a welcome guest at my table."

Again the blood rushed into the cheeks of Reuben, perhaps propelled there by a consciousness of having weakly yielded to feminine authority, in spite of the suggestions of his own better judgment.

"It now rests solely with you, Mr. Herbert," continued lord de Morville, "to damp my hopes, or to gratify them. I trust that no family reasons will prevent your favouring me with your company."

"I am infinitely obliged to you, my lord," said Arthur, "and shall be happy to avail myself of your hospitable invitation; but I must first learn how my mother is engaged, when she quits Mrs. Glendore, which will be nearly about the same time as that fixed on for your departure."

"I must endeavour to persuade her to be of our party," said his lordship, as

he rose from table. "Should I succeed, my pleasure will be great indeed."

On entering the drawing-room, the attention of lord de Morville was immediately fixed by the voice of Virginia, accompanying herself on the piano. Pride and gratified affection sparkled in his eyes. "I need not be ashamed of my sister," thought he exultingly. "I need not blush to present her even to lady Deterville."

Reuben attended to the call of Alicia, and placed himself between her and Dorinda, whose white hand still displayed the stolen ring of Glendore's affianced bride. Sir James and Arthur stood entranced by the side of the latter, while lord de Morville so eloquently urged his suit to Mrs. Herbert, that, by the time Virginia had risen from the instrument, he was enabled to congratulate her upon the success of his application. Virginia, unused to control her feelings, caught the hands of Mrs. Herbert, and kissing them
with

with rapture, expressed her joy in the liveliest terms.

“ This is, indeed, a happiness,” said she, “ which I had not dared to expect ; and it is to you and my dear brother that I owe it. May I not hope that you will witness my return to a home from which I have been so long alienated ? ”

Mrs. Herbert seemed affected ; she wished to comply with the desire of her young friend, but could not with propriety quit Mrs. Glendore before the day fixed for her departure. Lord de Morville instantly proposed to remain at the cottage until then, to the mutual satisfaction of his sister and of Mrs. Herbert.

During this arrangement Mrs. Meredith was busily engaged in conversation with lady Lambton, who, to her inexpressible delight, knew of a person who would take the cottage, and at her own price, and who would also be glad to re-

tain the housekeeper, and any other of the servants.

Mrs. Meredith, overjoyed at the prospect of a *good* tenant, resolved (as it was an object of great consideration to a woman of eight thousand a-year) to leave the three female servants; and the little assistance she should want in beautifying her person, her niece Winifred was both able and willing to bestow; while, in return, she would occasionally perform the same office for her.

It never entered the head of Mrs. Meredith, that for a woman of her large fortune to be without a waiting-maid would have a singular appearance to the domestics of de Morville Castle; or, if it had, and she had even heard them call her a stingy old cat—a niggardly old toad, it would not have had the least effect upon the placid nerves of Mrs. Meredith. Besides, it would be very wrong to allow Winifred a maid—it might fill her mind
with

ideas of fancied greatness, which it was not the intention of her aunt to realize. If she gave her clothes to deck herself with to advantage, and now and then a little pocket-money, it was all that she must expect from aunt Meredith.

CHAPTER III.

As the time drew near for the departure of Virginia, the heart of Marian grew sad indeed. She loved with idolatrous fondness the chosen friend of her youth, and she knew that her affection was returned with equal tenderness. Her presence and advice had often repressed the exuberance of Virginia's youthful spirits; and when those spirits were depressed by the uncertainty of her own situation, the caresses of Marian quickly restored the smile of

grateful love to the dimpled cheeks of Virginia. It was in vain that Marian framed daily excuses for the beloved companion of her childhood—all voices were now raised against her, except that of her father. Even Reuben, one of the best and most lenient of human beings, even he condemned what he termed the heartless vanity of Virginia. Had she not neglected him for the notice of a stranger? and was she not now encouraging the attentions of Mr. Herbert, though she knew how highly those attentions were prized by Alicia? What could the gentle Marian oppose to the united opinion of her whole family? tears, at length, were her only reply; till, wearied out by their reproaches and their importunities, Marian was obliged to give up the cause as hopeless, and to mourn in secret at the near approach of a separation which, she feared, was only the forerunner of an eternal one.

The indignation of Mrs. Glendore and
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of Alicia, on learning that lord de Morville had invited the Herberts to accompany him to his family-seat, was at first unbounded. The former vented her ill-humour by the bitterest invectives against the cunning of Virginia, to whom she attributed the invitation, as well as the coldness observable in the manners of his lordship towards themselves—"Should Mr. Herbert by this visit slip through our fingers, my Alicia," said she, "we have at least the consolation of knowing that his sister remains behind—that she loves Reuben to distraction—and that she only waits for the proposal coming from himself to make him master of all her wealth."

Although this seemed to afford comfort to the angry mind of Mrs. Glendore, it held out small hope of happiness to her daughter, who was by far more attached to the person of Herbert than to his fortune. Concealing, however, from motives of pride, even from her mother, the ex-

tent of her feelings, she appeared indifferent as to the loss of a husband; while in secret she determined to retaliate most severely on Virginia for those hours of watchful misery which she had endured ever since her introduction to Herbert.

On one subject she knew the mind of Virginia to be particularly irritable—the mysterious prejudice which her father had manifested towards her from her infancy. To find out the cause of this prejudice—to keep alive the irritation, and to alarm her delicacy by hints respecting her mother—was what Alicia purposed, as affording an ample field of revenge, and the certain means of poisoning that bliss which she must otherwise enjoy as the beloved of Arthur. Neither did she intend to allow the impression to wear off which she had already made, by awakening his fears respecting the virtues of Virginia. Under the pretence of anxious solicitude for the welfare of her friend, Alicia requested that he would write to her an account

count of her conduct after her return to her home; but, in reality, this request, to which he so willingly acceded, was only made that she might still be enabled to insinuate into her letters the slow but certain venom of detraction. The poison she would make use of was lingering, but it was nevertheless sure.

The behaviour of Miss Glendore was far different from that of Alicia. It is true that she had not been outrivalled by Virginia; but had that been the case, there was a dignity and innate generosity in the soul of Juliana which forbad her to stoop to the meanness of revenge. She mourned in private over the fatal vanity of the being she once deemed perfect; and though she no longer acknowledged her to be worthy of the heart of Reuben, she disdained to become her traducer. The name of Virginia never passed her lips uncalled for; and she considered her most unpardonable fault to be that of having prejudiced the mind of lord de Morville against

the family for which she had ever testified the warmest affection, and to which she was indebted for all of the higher order of pleasures that she had enjoyed.

Appearances were so strongly against Virginia in this instance, that even Marian sought not to excuse an action so ungrateful, so unworthy of the friend she loved. To the angry upbraidings of Mrs. Glendore, for still receiving her with the same shew of affection, poor Marian respectfully recapitulated various proofs of the excellence of Virginia's heart, and ventured sometimes to hint at the probability that experience would prove as salutary to her as it did to others. Finding, however, that this only increased the displeasure of her mother, Marian forbore to continue a vindication which only added to the dislike Mrs. Glendore already entertained for her beloved Virginia—a dislike which operated more strongly to disunite her from Reuben than even the thoughtless levity of a night.

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It was after one of these unpleasant family altercations, that Marian withdrew into the garden, in order to give vent to her feelings of regret and disappointment, which she dared not show before her mother. Her feet instinctively turned towards the walk which led to a rustic arbour, the favourite seat of herself and Virginia. It was here they had been accustomed to sit and converse with unchecked confidence—it was here that Marian used to breathe forth the fond wishes of her heart, and anticipate the hour when Virginia would, as the wife of her brother, have a still dearer claim to her affection; and it was in this bower, which she had named after that fascinating friend, that Marian had witnessed the exchange of rings between her and Reuben, who, emboldened by the presence and by the proposal of his sister, had placed on the soft, white hand of his virgin-bride the golden pledge of future felicity.

In imagination Marian beheld the lovely

face of Virginia suffused with blushes, as Glendore, with more than boyish pleasure, pressed his lips to those of the embarrassed maid, his own fair cheek crimsoning at the touch of hers, and his light hair waving luxuriantly over his forehead, half-hiding the bright blue eyes, which then sparkled with anticipated happiness. Sweet to the soul of Marian was this day-dream of domestic bliss; it had charmed to rest the fears of hopeless love; and in dwelling on the future joys of two beings so justly dear to her, she almost forgot that fate might have destined her to be for ever a stranger to the endearments of conjugal affection.

Marian had no longer this sovereign remedy to resort to against despair. Her private sorrows were increased by the certainty that Reuben no longer considered Virginia as his affianced wife, and by the fear lest the friend of her choice should prove unworthy of the idolatrous fondness with which she had ever regarded her. The
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ring of Virginia, which was so triumphantly displayed by Miss Herbert, was to Marian the melancholy prognosticator of eternal separation between her and Glendore; while the sparkling gift of Arthur, which had displaced the modest pledge of her brother's truth, was an omen of equal misfortune.

Dispirited and unhappy, the tears of Marian were falling fast on the upraised head of her little dog, who in mute eloquence was licking the hand of his gentle mistress, as he reposed on her lap, when the sound of footsteps startled her. They were those of Virginia, who, not finding Marian at home, had sought her in the well-known bower, anxious to take one more survey of a place rendered dear to them both by many a nameless pleasure.

"My Marian!" exclaimed Virginia, as she threw her arms round the neck of her friend; "you are in tears, and alone; tell me, dearest Marian, the cause of your grief."

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“And cannot your own heart, Virginia, divine the cause? does not to-morrow separate me from you—from the friend of my childhood—my adopted sister—from her with whom I have constantly resided for more than five years, except that fatal month which I passed at Worthing?—oh, Virginia! disappointed as I am in *all* my hopes of happiness, have I not cause to weep?”

Virginia burst into tears; she strained the slender form of Marian to her bosom—she assured her of her undiminished regard, and earnestly besought her pardon for having thoughtlessly occasioned her any uneasiness—“I know,” said she, with that amiable candour which almost palliated her faults, “I know that I have acted inconsiderately, dearest Marian; but let not *your* heart condemn me. Have I not suffered for my crime by the loss of your brother’s esteem—by the altered manners of your family?”

“The open confession of your error
cancels

cancels it with me," replied Marian. "Let the experience of a night's levity, however, sink deep into your mind, my Virginia, and let the steadiness of your future conduct atone for that weak vanity which lost you the possession of a heart in itself a treasure. Nay, do not weep thus violently—restrain, my beloved friend, this useless sorrow. Time may convince us both that there are dispositions more consonant with yours than that of my brother. What now appears to me an evil of magnitude, may in the end prove a blessing."

"I cannot be happy under the idea of having become indifferent to Reuben," said Virginia, sobbing aloud. "There exists not that being to whom I would betray this weakness, save yourself."

"You are not, nor ever can be, indifferent to my brother," cried Marian; "but I will not deceive you with the cruel illusion that he feels for you what he once did. High-spirited, and even thoughtless
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in most things, yet Reuben possesses a delicate sense of honour, with respect to the conduct of her whom he would choose as the companion of his life. Had your strange neglect of him been less public, or had it happened on any other night than what it did, or had any coolness subsisted between you, he might have found some excuse for the marked singularity of your behaviour—were it possible to do this, Virginia, I should have done it.—Since then you have not even testified to him, by any little action, your sense of error—your wish to be reinstated in his good opinion. Even his ring has given place to a more splendid present; may that present bring with it also a felicity more permanent than the less costly pledge of my brother's fidelity!"

"And is it you, my Marian, that now upbraids me with the removal of your brother's ring, when he was the first to part with mine? and to whom did he give it? to Miss Herbert, whose wealth has proved
the

the magnet which has attracted the hearts of your whole family—to Miss Herbert, whose name was eternally repeated to me before I had seen her, and to whom Mrs. Glendore had predisposed of the hand of her son.”

“ I am perfectly ignorant,” replied Marian, “ as to the means by which Derinda became mistress of your ring. Yet how could my brother set a value on it, Virginia, after so public a mark of your indifference during the whole of that unlucky night? did you not attach yourself entirely to the Lambtons? was it difficult, do you think, to perceive the too-willing ear you lent to the polished flattery of sir James, who was your only partner, except for the first dances, which you were engaged to go down with my brother? and what construction could he possibly put upon your singular speech to sir James, that he might have been misinformed as to the nature of your engagement with Reuben? Ah, my dear Virginia! I was indeed a most interested

rested spectator of the folly of that night, which unveiled to my partial eyes the weakness of my chosen friend, and which was a severe disappointment to the best of brothers. His sudden departure next morning betrayed the effect which your conduct had on his mind. He believes that you were mistaken in the nature of your feelings towards himself—he wishes you happy, happy as the unsettled state of human affairs will admit; and if he, who is the best of sons and the kindest of brothers, now yields to the wishes of the parent who lives but to promote the good of her children, can you, in justice, be surprised or hurt at his determination?"

"No, no, I am not surprised," said Virginia, in a low voice; "and as to my being hurt at his pointed behaviour to Miss Herbert, that is a matter of little importance to him, or to any one else. It was you, Marian, who taught me to believe that Reuben loved me—it was you who persuaded me to plight my faith to him—
and

and it is to you alone that I would betray my present agitation, or confess that I never imagined how dear he was to me, until I had lost him. Yet why should I regret the folly of that night, since it has given him and his family a plausible excuse to break with one who might otherwise have been an impediment to his greatness? of course, Marian, I exempt you from this censure."

"I do not wish for such an exemption," replied Marian, gravely, "and am pained, Virginia, to see that the pride of your heart induces you to be unjust towards those who have ever viewed you in the most favourable light, until your own imprudence made them tremble for the peace of a beloved relative, should it be committed to your care."

"Let the subject drop for ever," said Virginia, rising haughtily from the seat; "this is the last time of my betraying a weakness which I now consider as disgraceful. Yet, Marian, I would not part
from

from you in anger," and her voice softened to its accustomed sweetness. " To-morrow I bid adieu, perhaps an eternal one, to this scene of many an innocent pleasure—of many a childish rapture; let us not part in anger, my Marian."

Marian flung her arms round the graceful form of her friend—" No," sighed she, " let us not part in anger. Our separation, I hope, will be a short one. Write to me, Virginia—let me still continue to be the confidant of your thoughts. You take with you my best wishes, and all that remains of a heart chilled by despair, and tortured by hopeless love. Come with me, my still dear Virginia; let us once more wander together over the grounds of Meredith House; and though no longer able to hail you as the sister of my adoption, yet remain the friend of my bosom."

Virginia returned the embrace of Marian, but tears of pride and mortified tenderness checked the intended reply. Melancholy

lancholy and self-accused, she found herself incapable of then taking leave of the family, and therefore proposed to call in the evening for that purpose.

Nothing could be more painful to the feelings of Virginia than this necessary point of civility, yet to evade it was impossible. Calling therefore to mind every circumstance which could rouse her spirits, and enable her to hide her inward vexation from the keen eyes of Alicia, and the equally-discerning ones of Juliana, she acquitted herself with tolerable success, notwithstanding that Dorinda seemed purposely to take every opportunity of displaying to her view the ring which had once been hers. She was to remain with the Glendores until their return to town; and Virginia imagined that she could trace in the smile of Miss Herbert a secret exultation at the nearness of her own departure, although she conversed with lord de Morville with the most friendly familiarity, and even expressed a hope that he
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would not be detained in the country longer than he then expected.

The ever-lively countenance of Reuben was less animated than usual; he evidently tried to force his spirits, but was compelled at last to have recourse to the excuse common in those cases, a sick headache. It did not, however, prevent him from enjoying the pleasures of harmony; and music was, in consequence, resorted to by Miss Herbert, who, calling on Virginia to sing, again brought to her sight the golden pledge of first affection. Virginia not only gained a victory over the starting tear, which for a moment dimmed her eye, but sung with such extreme taste and richness of voice, that even Dorinda felt the magic of her powers, and complimented her upon her performance.

“Such praise as yours,” said lord de Morville, exultingly, “encourages me to hope that my sister only wants a little more experience, and the assistance of a skilful master, to render her complete mistress

mistress of the art.—Virginia, I must have you taught the harp—it is my favourite instrument. When you are introduced to lady Deterville, you will be enchanted by her performance, and by the beauty of her voice.”

“Lady Deterville!” exclaimed Reuben, hastily; “are you acquainted with her ladyship?”

“She is my most particular friend,” replied his lordship; “and will, I am certain, feel happy to afford my sister every service in her power. Are you personally known to the countess?”

“I have met her frequently in public.”

“Is she not one of the most beautiful creatures in the world?” inquired lord de Morville, with a solicitude which did not escape the notice of Mrs. Herbert, who felt an immediate interest in the character and principles of a woman to whom the innocent Virginia was to be introduced, and to whom, in all probability, she was
to

to look up as a model for her future conduct.

“ She is not only beautiful, but dangerously fascinating,” said Reuben. “ It is a pity that she is so dissipated, as it lays her open to the censure of all those who may be inclined to think that she would be more estimable were she less indifferent to public opinion.”

“ Who is the countess of Deterville?” said Mrs. Herbert, turning towards Mr. Glendore, with no common degree of curiosity.

“ Indeed, my dear madam, you have applied to one very ill able to give you the information you desire; but I apprehend that lord de Morville is perfectly capable of replying to your question.”

The blood rushed into the cheeks of his lordship, more perhaps from the secret conviction of his own feelings than from the speech of Mr. Glendore—“ Lady Deterville,” said he, “ was the only daughter
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of the late sir David Montgomery, whose fortune being small, and having three sons to establish in life, prevented him from bestowing on their sister any thing more than an education, which, joined to her natural talents, brilliant wit, and captivating manners, would secure to her an eligible establishment. His wishes were soon accomplished. The earl of Deterville saw Miss Montgomery at a ball, and was so charmed with the loveliness of her person, that he called next day upon sir David, and begged leave to be permitted to address his daughter as a lover. The earl had been a widower only ten months; he had no children, and his estate was such as to enable him to offer Miss Montgomery a handsome settlement. It is true that he was more than thirty years her senior; but then sir David considered that his daughter would be a countess, and that the interest of her husband would of course be used in favour of her brothers. He therefore gave an immediate

consent to the request of the earl; and in less than three months he had the satisfaction of seeing his lovely daughter saluted as countess of Deterville. My friend Glendore seems to think her too gay—a strange cause of complaint from a man of his lively disposition! It is, however, easily to be excused in one so lovely, and whose society is so universally courted as that of lady Deterville.”

“The world is but too apt to judge with severity of the most innocent actions,” replied Mrs. Herbert; “and I am sorry to say, that if lady Deterville is as fascinating as you have represented, she will find enemies in abundance among her own sex. It is, nevertheless, to be hoped that her good sense will teach her the propriety of yielding a little to the opinions of the world. The great disparity of years between her and the earl is a sufficient cause to give birth to ill-natured surmises; but I should have thought that my friend Reuben Glendore, was too generous to be
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the first to expose the weakness of a beautiful woman, who must at heart be amiable, since lord de Morville intends to introduce to her his sister."

Both the young men looked a little confused; but they were relieved by Mrs. Meredith reminding her young companions, that as they must rise earlier than usual, it was now time to take leave. Mr. Glendore embraced Virginia with parental affection, telling her, at the same time, that he should remove to town with his family sooner than usual, that he might have the pleasure of seeing her and the companions of her journey as early as possible. Mrs. Glendore thought herself called on to give some testimony of the regard she formerly professed for Virginia; and her daughters also severally embraced their lovely friend; while Reuben, starting hastily from the couch, on which he was seated by the side of Miss Herbert, declared his intention of walking with them to the cottage.

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Once more Virginia found herself alone with the favourite brother of her beloved Marian; but not as usual did her heart throb with delight upon taking his offered arm. Although her spirits were depressed by the parting from those she had so fondly and so constantly loved from childhood, yet she now rallied them again, lest by any vexatious look or word she should authorise him to suppose her heart less free than his. She talked with vivacity upon the pleasure she should enjoy in being introduced to the few surviving relations of her brother, and to his chosen friend, the beautiful lady Deterville; of the amusement which the old castle would afford her and Winifred; and of the variety of matter which she should have to communicate to Marian.

Reuben heard her with silent attention; he thought her gaiety of heart quite natural; yet his own, which was wont to beat with increased pulsation at the sound of her animating voice, now seemed to die
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with him, and he vainly attempted to shake off the languor which became more and more visible as they drew near to Meredith Cottage. He attempted several times to give vent to his feelings, but his tongue appeared to have lost its accustomed function, and his eyes, the general expression of which was mirth and joy, were now humid with tears.

Mrs. Meredith and her niece were on before with lord de Morville. He heard them laughing happily; their hearts were light and cheerful as his was used to be. An involuntary sigh escaped him.

Virginia started; she turned her face towards him; all her boasted firmness forsook her upon seeing the dejection so visibly depicted on his countenance—"Reuben!" said she, in a voice of tremulous sweetness.

"Virginia!" was his reply; he wished to say more; he took her hand, but again the warmth of his feelings was repressed

by the idea of his family, and he dropped it. "When next we meet," said he, "both our circumstances may be changed. I shall see you seldom, except in public; but I shall not feel the less interested for your welfare. Cultivate the friendship of Mrs. Herbert, who is a most disinterested friend, and will advise you, Virginia, for the best; but do not confide too much in the professions of lady Deterville. I do not wish to prejudice you against a person so highly esteemed by your brother; but remember, Virginia, that levity and thoughtlessness in a woman are but too often the forerunners of guilt—that it is not sufficient to be personally virtuous, if the mind is not equally free from contamination. I know of no actual crime attached to the character of lady Deterville; but she is too careless of censure, and too negligent of her domestic duties, not to draw on herself the slander of her acquaintance. It is true that she is lovely and

captivating

captivating in the extreme; but she is vain, giddy, and imprudent." He sighed deeply as he concluded.

"She is unfortunate in being the object of *your* censure, at least," replied Virginia. "I thank you, however, for this proof of lingering esteem for myself, and will not fail to profit by your warning admonition."

"Lingering esteem!" repeated Reuben, retaking her hand, and looking tenderly in her face. Then suddenly drawing off her glove, he exclaimed, "Ah, Virginia, I did not imagine that you would so soon have displaced my ring for this sparkling token of another's love! I thought, at least, that you would have waited a little—that you would have tried what time and circumstances might have wrought in the mind of my mother. But no matter, I am to blame in thus betraying that you have still the power to pain me; in even wishing you to decline a connexion which is so highly advantageous, for one which

only affords a prospect of domestic bickerings and female quarrels."

Virginia, surprised, hurt, and angry at the reproach of Reuben, coldly withdrew her hand, saying, that she hoped it was the last time he would ever recur to the subject of what they had once been to each other—"Be assured," said she, "that had I not become the object of your indifference, I have too sincere a regard for your happiness, to interfere with your advancement in life. I am myself fortuneless; and, as your mother observes, my title only adds to my poverty: not for the world would I mar your opening prospects, or allow you to bring a titled beggar into your father's house. Oh, how little do your mother and Alicia know of my heart! They rejoice at my departure—they have no cause; I would not enter unsolicited or unwelcome into their family, to be made mistress of the universe. They have known me from a child, yet they are strangers to me. Time may convince

vince them, that though the folly of a night, and the vanity of a moment, made me appear unworthy their preference, yet I am not wholly so of their esteem. Farewell, Reuben! perhaps had I not first seen my ring on the hand of Miss Herbert, you would not have had to reproach me for exchanging yours for that of her brother's." Saying this, she darted from him, and entered the cottage just as the rest of the party had gained the lawn.

Reuben remained conversing with lord de Morville for some minutes, in the hope of being able to speak once more to Virginia; but in this he was disappointed; she did not make her appearance during his stay, and he was therefore compelled reluctantly to take leave, with a secret conviction, that could he but have obtained the opportunity he wished, an explanation must have ensued, which might, in a great measure, have fixed their future destinies.

Slowly he returned to Meredith House, his mind wavering between his duties as a son and his feelings as a lover; the former, however, prevailed; the sight of his mother and sisters, their caresses and their tender attentions, so necessary to his happiness, convinced him, that to act in opposition to their wishes would only be to sign his own misery, and to entail on himself the lasting reproaches of his own conscience.

CHAPTER IV.

IN quitting the well-beloved scenes of her infancy, Virginia could not avoid shedding tears, as a variety of occurrences passed before her mind in quick succession, followed by a train of innocent endearments, which it was now become her duty to forget. The possibility also that it might be long, very long, ere she should be able to revisit Meredith Cottage, or if it were not, how changed would be her feelings, assisted to increase her uneasiness. On the other hand, the natural vanity of a young heart was again called into action, as she saw the elegant equipage of her brother, with four fine horses and two out-riders, drive up to the door of the cottage, and

which, in future, would be ready for her commands; nor was it lessened by the recollection that she was returning to the castle of her ancestors, from which in a short time she should be transported to town, and received in public as the sister of lord de Morville; that however coldly Mrs. Glendore had conducted herself towards her, on account of her want of fortune, there were *those* whose pointed attentions had already convinced her that her personal attractions were sufficiently great to overbalance the want of riches.

Winifred was in high spirits, as well as her aunt. The old lady had every reason to be good-tempered; she had let her house on very advantageous terms—she was going to reside for some time *free of all expence*, where she would be looked upon with the highest veneration and respect, and where her niece would have a chance, at least, of marrying well. As it would not cost her any thing, she took
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with her her carriage and three of her servants, the rest remaining with the family who were to reside at the cottage.

The arrival of Mrs. Herbert's barouche was the signal for departure. They however paused for a moment, to make some arrangements, lord de Morville being desirous that one carriage should contain them all; but Mrs. Herbert proposing to take a seat in Mrs. Meredith's chariot, it was agreed that Virginia, Winifred, and Arthur, should accompany lord de Morville, while the female domestics belonging to the ladies might occupy the barouche of Mrs. Herbert. This settled, the party proceeded on their journey.

It was late before the grey turrets of de Morville Castle, half mantled with ivy, broke upon the view of the travellers, as they descended by moonlight into a beautiful valley, at the extremity of which, upon a gentle eminence, finely surrounded by wood and intersected by water, stood the ancient seat of the de Morvilles.

Mrs.

Mrs. Herbert had been indisposed the whole of the journey, but would not suffer her companion to mention it. Her indisposition appeared to increase towards evening, and as they entered the valley, she was obliged to lean for support against the shoulder of Mrs. Meredith, who besought her not to have the glasses down of the carriage, lest the night air might affect a constitution already but too sensible to the changes of the atmosphere.

Mrs. Herbert recovered, and in spite of the good-natured admonition of her friend, continued to look out of the window, as if unwilling to lose a glimpse of the beautiful scenery around her.—“In early youth,” said Mrs. Herbert, “I visited frequently this enchanting valley. Even by the partial light of the moon it appears unchanged. Time has not been so liberal to me; sorrow and sickness have stolen from me the bloom of health, and the intense heat of an Eastern climate has brought on a premature old age.”

“Have

“Have you ever seen the countess de Morville?” inquired Mrs. Meredith. “She must have been a lovely woman, if she was like her daughter.”

“I have seen her,” replied Mrs. Herbert. “She was much younger than the earl, and accounted handsome. She might have been happy, notwithstanding the disparity of their years, had not the disposition of her husband embittered every moment of her life.”

“That was sad indeed,” said the old lady. “I can easily conceive that his lordship possessed very little of the milk of human kindness. His conduct towards his child proves that he was not overburthened with feeling. I have always thought that a congeniality of temper and opinion is indispensibly necessary to make the married state what it ought to be; and I would always recommend, that in the choice of a husband, the first thing which should be attended to is good temper.”

“You are perfectly right, my dear Mrs. Meredith;

Meredith; but I believe that lady de Morville was very little consulted in the disposal of her hand. I have heard that she was guided by the wishes of her father, more than by those of her own heart. She was to blame in yielding too readily to paternal ambition; the sufferings of a wife, it is to be hoped, atoned for the weakness of a daughter."

The carriages now drove up to the Gothic door of the castle; lord de Morville gaily leapt from his, and offering his hand to the blushing Winifred, assisted her to alight, and then hastened to perform the same office for her aunt and amiable companion. The animation, the delight pictured on the handsome countenance of the young lord, as he raised the cold hand of Mrs. Herbert to his lips, as he bade her welcome, thrice welcome, to his home, seemed to revive her drooping form. She leaned upon his arm, and upon that of Virginia; she felt the affectionate pressure of their hands, and the fatigue of the journey

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ney appeared trivial; her spirits returned, she embraced her lovely supporter, and congratulated her upon the pleasing prospect now open to her, in being restored to the protection and love of her brother; then lifting her beautiful blue eyes to heaven, she seemed to call down a blessing upon them both.

Lord de Morville contemplated her for a few minutes. The same indescribable sensation filled his heart as when he first beheld her; but duty to his other guests made him repress his feelings, and he turned from the interesting object before him, to do the honours of his house.

Mrs. Meredith, in particular, felt herself gratified, by his requesting, that as she had hitherto been the guardian and director of his sister, she would continue her maternal cares. He begged her to consider herself at home, and to make whatever alterations or arrangements in his family she might think proper.—“Virginia,” said he, “is mistress of my household while
while

while I remain single; but she is too young to receive company, unless you kindly continue to countenance her by your presence, and encourage her by your advice."

Virginia, ashamed of the starting tears which betrayed the keen sensibility of her nature, flung her arms round the neck of the kind protectress of her youth; and kissing her cheek with grateful affection, said—"Though no father's voice recalls me to my home, or mother's tenderness bids me welcome, yet must I not complain, since Providence has reserved to me the heart of my dear brother, and bestowed on me the friendship of the highly-valued beings by whom I am now surrounded."

Lord de Morville embraced his sister, and assured her that it should be his study to make her happy.

After taking some refreshment, the party retired to the chambers which had been got ready for their reception. In that allotted to Virginia, she found the housekeeper in attendance, who, with
many

many courtesies down to the ground, respectfully inquired if she should remain and assist her ladyship's maid in undressing her?

Virginia, with that sweetness of deportment which is so grateful to the feelings of an inferior, declined her offer; and Mrs. Barber hastened to impart to the anxious household the favourable opinion which she had already formed of their future mistress.

The young woman who now waited to receive the commands of Virginia was the daughter of one of Mrs. Meredith's tenants. She had been permitted to play with her when a child, before the arrival of the Miss Merediths, and Virginia had become extremely partial to her. She taught her to read and write, and to do a variety of fancy works; always promising that when she grew up to be a woman, and mistress of her own fortune, Amy should be her maid. The girl's person was pretty and genteel; she possessed
great

great quickness of intellect and a grateful heart; and by associating with Virginia, her manners insensibly became more refined than those of her family, who anxiously looked forward to the time when she should become servicable to the generous little girl who had so kindly instructed her in all she knew. That time was now come, and Amy obeyed with delight the summons of Virginia, to attend her to de Morville Castle.

As she had always been accustomed to speak her sentiments with respectful openness, Amy no sooner found herself alone with her young lady, than she expressed her hopes that they should not make a long stay at the castle. She had been sent forward with the rest of the female domestics, and had arrived two hours before her mistress. The venerable appearance of the building, its ivied towers, and windows of stained glass, through which the moon beamed with a dim, religious light, filled the mirth-loving mind of Amy with

with inconceivable awe; and she shuddered at the echo of her own footsteps, as she trod the winding staircase and gloomy gallery of the castle, which led to the apartments of Virginia.

“Mercy on me!” said she, looking fearfully round the bedroom, which, though illumined by two wax candles, was still more than half in shade; “mercy on me! I know not how your ladyship feels, but I know if I was a person of fashion, I would never live in any house that was not light and cheerful. If all family mansions are like this, I hope your ladyship will live chiefly in London. I shall never be gay while I stay here; even the looks of the servants partake of the gloom of the castle.”

“Judge not so hastily, Amy,” replied Virginia, smiling at the prejudices of her favourite; “to-morrow’s sunshine will clear away the gloom of which you complain, and thy mirth-loving heart will once more recover its elasticity.”

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“ If your ladyship would but allow me to sleep on the sofa in the next room, I should be so glad. I don't know how it is, but I feel so strange since I have been here, I could cry at the sight of my own shadow.”

“ Your request is granted, Amy. I too feel strange, but it is not fear. I love the gloomy grandeur of an edifice like this, and shall feel a mournful pleasure as I tread its floors, and retrace in imagination the footsteps of my parents. Tomorrow, perhaps, I may be blessed with a sight of their portraits. You shall inquire, Amy, of the housekeeper, which were the apartments of my mother. I should like to inhabit them.”

Amy thought this a singular fancy in one so young and lively as her ladyship, but she said nothing. Adding more faggots to the fire, and lighting the lamp, she retired by the desire of her mistress, taking care to leave open the door of her chamber, that she might receive comfort
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from its blaze, and when that was gone, from the rays of the lamp, should her fears keep her awake.

It was a fine, mild morning in November, when the guests of lord de Morville assembled in the breakfast-parlour. All but Mrs. Herbert and her son appeared well and happy. A hectic flush on her cheek denoted a sleepless night; and as she kissed the blooming one of Virginia, the trembling of her frame betrayed its inability to bear any extra fatigue.

Arthur watched every movement of her once-beautiful countenance. His very being seemed to be entwined with hers; and he besought her not to add to her debility, by accompanying her friends over the apartments of the castle. His tenderness could scarcely exceed the pleasing attentions of lord de Morville, who felt more and more attached to his highly-interesting guest. Yet it was neither love nor admiration that filled the breast of his lordship, it was an indefinable something, untranslatable

untranslatable even to himself, that seemed to swell his heart whenever his eyes met the glance of hers.

In wandering over the spacious apartments of the castle, Virginia beheld a display of ancient magnificence, which she heard with regret was to give place to modern elegance. Her brother intended to make various alterations in the seat of his ancestors, and to render its appearance, as Amy would have said, more gay and cheerful. Its fine collection of paintings were to remain, for what fashionable ornaments could his lordship procure that would so well accord with the air of the building? The library promised to Virginia an endless source of amusement; yet her eyes wandered from object to object, in search of the resemblance of him who gave her being, and she longed, yet feared, to ask her brother the question.

Taking advantage of Mrs. Meredith and Arthur being engaged in viewing some antique gems, lord de Morville led his

his

his sister and Winifred into a small room of curiosities, and opening a valuable cabinet, shewed her the miniatures of her uncle, admiral Sedley, his two sons, and others belonging to her family. Virginia's attention was now fixed by a black frame, which had been made to contain two pictures. Only one, however, remained; it was that of a peer, habited in his robes; the countenance was handsome, the eyes a brilliant hazel, and the features reminded her of those of her brother. She held it tremblingly in her hands. Tears started into her eyes; she raised them to the face of lord de Morville, who, pressing her to his bosom, said—"Dearest Virginia, Nature points out to you the parent who gave you life! He is no more! Let his prejudices be forgotten, and let the minds of his children remember only that he was human, and therefore liable to err; that he was their father, and therefore a creditor upon their lenity and affection."

“ Oh, my father !” exclaimed Virginia, raising his resemblance to her lips, “ from whatever cause you denied me the delightful task of proving to you my filial love, my filial duty, no sentiment of anger fills my heart at your strange abandonment of me from my infancy. Sorrow at being banished from thy presence, at being estranged from thy affection, is what I now feel. And thou, too, my mother ! alas ! but for thy untimely loss, the breast of my father had not been steeled against his child. Ah me ! what sacrilegious hand has dared to displace my mother’s picture ? what barbarian has robbed me of the mournful privilege of gazing on my mother’s features ?”

Winifred tried to console her weeping friend, who, leaning on her brother, gave vent to her tears and disappointed hopes. Lord de Morville affectionately soothed her distress, and spoke so feelingly of the mortification he himself had sustained
upon

upon finding the frame empty, that Virginia at that moment loved him more dearly than ever.

“ I will endeavour to find for you,” said he, “ the key of those apartments which belonged to her, and which have been shut up since her death. I have never had courage to enter them. You will probably find several articles which will be valuable to you for her sake, unless they are grown mouldy by damp and time.”

This proposal was joyfully accepted by Virginia, whose sanguine mind instantly formed a hope that she should discover in the forsaken rooms of her lamented mother, some documents by which she could form an opinion of the taste and sentiments of her parent. Drying her tears, she replaced the cause of them in the cabinet, and returned to Mrs. Meredith and Mr. Herbert. Arthur immediately perceived that Virginia had been

weeping. He would have spoken to her, but could only press her hand, as lord de Morville called to him to follow to the grand saloon.

In passing through the several apartments, Herbert seemed to recognise in each some article familiar to his eye, which brought to his remembrance the days of his childhood. But the moment he entered the drawing-room he felt convinced that his suspicions were true. The drapery, the various ornaments, and, above all, a set of small golden figures, which stood on the mantle-piece, and which he had often viewed with a desiring eye when a boy, convinced him that at length he had obtained the long-cherished wish of his soul. But where was the angel form that used to dispense light and life to all around her? whose sweet caresses had left an indelible impression on his memory, and whose tender voice yet vibrated on his ear? The fairy scenes of his imagination

gination were once more before him, and he only wanted to behold one more spot to make "assurance doubly sure."

Notwithstanding that the approach of winter had despoiled the garden of its choicest treasures, yet the mildness of the season still gave to the picturesque scenery which surrounded the castle the hue of early autumn. The lawn retained its verdure, and the sun yet lingered on the clear surface of the water which flowed at its feet. Herbert stood on the margin of the river like one enchanted. He heard not the inquiries of Mrs. Meredith, or the praises of Virginia. Chance, or fate, or what you will, had again transported him to the spot which had for so many years haunted his fancy. Again, in idea, he saw the little vessel launched on the sparkling water, again he saw the open and ingenuous countenance of his youthful companion, and heard the syren voice which prayed that neither time nor circumstances might disunite them. The

singularity of his return, after an absence of fourteen years, the mysterious bequest of his father, and the certainty that in lord de Morville he beheld the lovely boy who had been the associate of his pleasures, operated so forcibly on the mind of Herbert, that he had not power to follow the footsteps of his friends ; he lost sight of them, and hurried back to the house.

With eagerness he again explored the chambers which he had just quitted, as if in search of the beings he had been accustomed to see in them when a child. The golden figures met his restless gaze. “ Where,” he exclaimed, throwing himself on a couch opposite to a large mirror, which reflected the surrounding objects, “ where, oh where is the lovely form that has so often pressed me in its snowy arms, and kissed the tear of boyish anguish from my cheek ? Alas ! was that sweet being the countess de Morville ? and am I fated never more to behold her on this earth ? Oh, Heaven, if the wish is not a criminal

criminal one, may I be permitted to see the spirit of my early friend, to pour forth
 ——”

Herbert at that instant raised his eyes to the mirror. He saw a female figure, clad in white. It moved—he started from his seat—“My wish is granted,” said he, falling on one knee, and bending forward, as if to receive its benediction.

“What means my beloved Arthur, and whence thy attitude?” inquired the figure in a tender voice.

Herbert rose hastily from the ground. His embarrassed eyes beheld—not the shade of the countess de Morville, but the half-fainting form of his mother-in-law! He caught her in his arms, he kissed, with filial affection, her cold, damp forehead, and supported her head on his bosom. She cast a languid glance round the chamber; a sigh of anguish escaped her, and she closed her eyes, as if to shut out a painful object.

“ My mother! my dear and idolized mother !” exclaimed Herbert, in a tone of alarm, “ why did you leave your room while you are so unwell? why did not you await my return, when I would have shewn you over the castle ?”

Mrs. Herbert opened her blue eyes, and fixed them gratefully on the affectionate countenance of Arthur. “ My son,” said she, “ I am no stranger to these apartments. Every part of the castle is well known to me. In early life I visited them; why should I now tremble to return to them, when *he* who was my deadliest foe no longer has the power to injure me ?”

Herbert looked surprised. Never until this moment had he heard his mother drop a hint that she was acquainted with the late lord de Morville, or that she had ever been his guest.

“ The sight of these rooms,” she continued, “ recalls a variety of painful ideas to
my

my remembrance; but what, my son, could occasion *your* emotion, *your* singular attitude, and mysterious words?"

"I will explain them to you some other time, my dearest mother. I would, if possible, have no secrets from you: but say, were you intimate with the countess de Morville?"

"What can induce you to make the inquiry, my dear Arthur? What is the countess de Morville to you?"

"Oh, my dear mother! blame not my curiosity——"

They were interrupted by the return of the party from their morning's ramble, an interruption which Herbert seemed to consider as far from disagreeable.

CHAPTER V.

THE gloomy grandeur of the castle, its fretted roofs, and Gothic ornaments, afforded infinite delight to Virginia, who wandered over the rooms with melancholy pleasure, examining the beautiful tapestry which decorated some of them, or the still more beautiful paintings which enriched others. She would then seat herself by turns on the different couches, on which she supposed the form of her lamented mother had reposed, or vainly try to discover, among the pages of poetry and romance, the traces of her hand-writing in the margin. These researches, prompted by filial tenderness, were rendered more painful by their being uncheered by the presence of a friend. Winifred.

nifred, who formerly loved to be her constant companion, was now too much occupied by her own thoughts, and by the desire of pleasing lord de Morville, to follow the footsteps of the restless Virginia. She was a good horsewoman, and generally rode out with his lordship and Mr. Herbert, Virginia being too timid to accompany them.

It was during the hours of their absence that our heroine indulged herself in sauntering over the apartments, or through the spacious grounds of the castle. It was then that she wished for her still-dear Marian, whose poetic taste and elevated mind would have added to the charm of the scenery around her. It was then, also, that a sigh would escape her, prompted by the recollection of those fairy hours, when, leaning on the arms of Reuben and of Marian, she listened with delight to their conversation, as free from care, and thoughtless of the future, they roved among the woods which skirted the do-

main of Meredith House. The sweet bond of amity and love which linked them together was now broken asunder; the levity of the night had given to the cold and calculating voice of interest a pretext to forbid their union; the gold and jewels of Miss Herbert eclipsed the portionless beauties of his affianced bride; and Virginia's glowing cheek evinced her secret anger at still finding that the weakness of her heart made her love to dwell on the remembrance of her youthful pleasures.

Lord de Morville was of too gay a disposition to think beyond the moment on any subject which gave him pain. He had therefore forgotten to look for the keys which opened the chambers belonging to his mother; yet, amidst his wildest sallies, the name of that mother, or the faint recollection of her doating fondness for himself, would call the starting tear to his eye, and damp the hilarity of his youthful spirits. At the request of his sister,

he

he searched among the secret drawers of his father, and at length produced a bunch, in which he conceived would be found those so much desired by Virginia.

“ May I, with your permission, appropriate them to myself?” said she, with a beseeching look.

“ Certainly, my love; but as our stay now will be short, wait until next spring. I will give orders to have them got ready by that time for your reception. The whole interior of the castle is to be fitted up against my coming of age, and those apartments shall be furnished according to your own taste.”

Virginia carried her treasure to Winifred, who was busily employed in making a watch-chain for lord de Morville, out of the dark tresses of her own hair. “ See, dearest Winifred, my brother’s present. I shall now be able to gratify my chief wish, to see the rooms once occupied by my mother. Will you go with me?”

“ Heavens! my dear Virginia,” cried Winifred,

Winifred, shuddering; “and do you mean to enter those chambers before they are ventilated? Let the housekeeper open the windows, and then I will accompany you.”

“No, Winifred,” replied Virginia, offended by her disinclination to comply with a request of hers. “Those rooms have been locked up ever since the death of my mother; my father has kept the key of them, and no hand but mine shall open them—no eye, since you refuse to accompany me, save mine, shall pry into the secrets of those chambers, until I have first explored them.”

Saying this she turned haughtily away, but Winifred caught her hand, and, entreating her forgiveness, expressed her readiness to go with her. The anger of Virginia instantly subsided, and taking the arm of the half-terrified Winifred, they proceeded to the southern wing of the castle, the whole of which was unoccupied by any of the family.

It

, It was with difficulty that Virginia could unlock the door of the anti-room. Time had rusted the lock, and for some minutes it resisted her efforts. She then hastened to unbar the shutters, and to admit the fresh air, trembling all the while with a secret awe which she tried to conceal from her companion.

The door of the next chamber gave her equal trouble. At length she succeeded, and they entered what had been the occasional sitting-room of the countess de Morville. The dampness of the confined air made them shudder; they felt giddy and faint, but, upon the opening of the windows, the vapour dispersed, and they quickly recovered from its baneful effects. The furniture of the apartment appeared to have suffered but little from the ravages of time. The purple velvet draperies were tolerably fresh, and the deep gold fringe alone was tarnished. Several stands for flowers, with valuable china pots, stood
in

12 ORIGINAL OF THE MINIATURE.

in the recesses ; the earth remained, but no vestige of the plants appeared. A few books, covered with dust, and green with mould, lay scattered on a sofa. They had been touched by her mother, and they became immediately sacred to Virginia. She opened one—it was an Italian romance. In the titlepage was written, Maria Virginia de Morville. The characters, though the ink was nearly colourless, struck her as being familiar to her. She felt assured that she had seen the same handwriting before, but her ideas were too confused to remember when or where. In one corner stood a harp. Virginia flew to it with haste. She wiped the dust from its chords, and struck what remained with trembling fingers. It might have been the favourite instrument of her mother. She knew enough to begin the study, and determined to pass some hours each day in practising, that she might surprise her brother. This intention she, however, concealed

concealed from Winifred ; and they next proceeded to the bedchamber of the countess.

The tears of Virginia had started more than once ; they now fell rapidly as she beheld the bed on which her mother had reposed, the toilet, with its necessary appendages, and the muslin robe lying at its feet, as if flung off in haste. Virginia would have pressed it to her lips, but it fell to pieces at her touch. Again she burst into tears, and availed herself of the supporting arm of her pale shivering companion, who besought her to return to the cheerful blaze of her own fireside. Virginia consented, more out of compassion to Winifred than herself, resolving to return next day with Amy, and help to put the rooms in order. The books, however, she carried with her, carefully relocking the doors, lest chance should lead some one that way before she had finished her search.

The next morning, followed by Amy, Virginia revisited the long forsaken apartments

ments of her mother. She gave orders for their being properly aired ; and, after examining every part of the sitting-room, lest any article should escape her notice, she set Amy to put it in order, while she passed on to the bedchamber. With religious care she collected some trifling articles of dress, moth-eaten and mouldy ; yet Virginia would not have exchanged them for the richest dresses in the costly wardrobe of Miss Herbert. On the toilet stood a mirror, the drawer of which was locked. Virginia hesitated to open it, yet it might contain some trifling ornament which she should consider as her choicest treasure, as having been worn by her lamented parent. Amy was dispatched for her lady's keys, but, to the great disappointment of Virginia, she had not one that would unlock it, and to force it she was averse.

“ Bless me,” cried Amy, looking round her with the glance of curiosity, “ I do not see any thing here which would give
one

one an idea of a sick chamber; and may I never enjoy the gaieties of dear London if the sheets are not still on the bed! Look, lady Virginia, it is thrown open, and there is the mark of its having been slept in."

"It is singular indeed," replied her ladyship, going towards the bed; "and yet, Amy, my dear mother might not have died in this room. It is more than probable that she was removed to another part of the castle."

"In that case, my lady, I see no reason why the housemaid should have forgotten to make the rooms decent. To my poor judgment, it seems as if they had been quitted in haste, and locked up to prevent any person from entering them."

"Perhaps, Amy, you are right. My dear mother might have left them for change of air, and my father might have had his own reasons for shutting them up. I shall, however, visit them daily,
and

and upon our return, next spring, to the castle, mean to occupy them myself."

Amy, who had known Virginia from a child, and witnessed a thousand instances of her habitual liveliness, could not help wondering at this strange resolution. She however consoled herself with the hope that her beloved lady might marry before spring, and that her husband would carry her to some more pleasant abode than the ivied towers of de Meriville Castle.

In the course of a few days, Virginia, assisted by Amy, had arranged every thing to her satisfaction. By the help of large fires, the rooms soon became habitable, and the extensive prospect from the windows promised to afford her many subjects for her pencil, when spring had clothed the hills and valley with its reviving verdure. Already had she new strung the harp, and every hour that she could steal from observation she devoted to its study.

Much

Much to her satisfaction, her brother testified no inclination to visit the long-deserted chambers, and to his guests she was silent respecting them. She interceded so eloquently with lord de Morville not to have the old-fashioned furniture displaced, that he good-naturedly gave her leave to do as she pleased, and to consider whatever they contained as her own.

While all the leisure moments of Virginia were spent in the southern wing of the castle, Arthur Herbert gradually became a prey to his internal vexations. The more he saw of Virginia, the more he found his tenderness increase for the original of the miniature. Yet the possibility, the dread lest she should possess a claim to his affection which rendered the sentiments she inspired him with criminal, rendered him truly miserable.

It was in vain that he flew to the letter of his father for relief; that only added to his sorrows, since it increased the mystery which hung over the fate of Virginia.

Neither

Neither could he avoid reverting to the singularity of his returning to the spot which circumstances of unexampled kindness had indelibly impressed on his infant mind. He no longer doubted but that the lovely form which had for so many years perpetually haunted his imagination was the countess de Morville. He even thought he could remember being interdicted by his father from mentioning her name. Of this he was assured, that he had been severely reproved, and banished a whole day from his presence, for persisting that a lady to whom he was presented was the countess. His father at length succeeded in convincing him of his error, and time and habit did away the illusion.

From feelings similar to those of Virginia, he loved to wander over the castle, and to linger in those rooms which boyish tenderness made dear to him, and he longed, yet dared not ask to visit those which had been shut up since her death, and which must be still more familiar to him

as being the private apartments of the countess. Drawn thither, however, by the restless inquietude of his mind, he was surprised to hear the sound of a harp. A superstitious awe for a moment made him pause. Ashamed of his weakness, he opened the door of the anti-room; it was light, and a blazing fire made it cheerful. Still more surprised, he moved gently forward, anxious to discover who had thus restored them to the light of heaven.

Through the crevice of the door he perceived the graceful form of Virginia, bending over her harp. Her white and taper fingers struck its chords, while her long chesnut hair, escaped from the comb which had confined it, fell in luxuriant ringlets over her neck and shoulders, adding a charm to their natural beauty. Herbert gazed on her with admiration.—“ Surely,” thought he, “ such must have been the countess de Morville.” An involuntary sigh escaped him. Virginia started, and turning pale, looked fearfully round the chamber.

Unwilling

Unwilling to alarm her, Arthur made his appearance, and entreated her pardon for intruding upon her privacy. "My only apology," said he, "for wandering to this part of the castle is the state of my own feelings, which makes me attribute a sanctity to every thing that once belonged to the countess de Morville."

Virginia's vexation at being discovered at her studies gave place to amazement on hearing the excuse of Herbert. "Oh tell me," she exclaimed, in a beseeching voice, while with one hand she threw back her glossy ringlets, "tell me, Mr. Herbert, how it is possible for you to know any thing of my mother, you who quitted England a mere child?"

"I was, however, old enough," he replied, "to retain a grateful sense of her endearing kindness. The remembrance of it still lives in my heart; and even you, all lovely as you are, create a double interest in my breast, from being the daughter of the countess de Morville."

He then repeated to her what had so long dwelt on his mind, and his emotion on first beholding herself—"You could not have been two years old," said he, "when I last visited the castle, but my heart alone would have informed me that you were sister to lord de Morville. The same natural instinct betrayed to me, in the casual glance I had of your brother at — Abbey, that we were not strangers to each other. Oh, how ardently I have prayed to Heaven that I might be permitted once again to see this spot, rendered dear to me by an association of grateful ideas! My wish is granted when I least expected; yet my heart is not satisfied; I rove from room to room, in search of her who bestowed on me so many marks of affection, and who, on the death of my mother, received me to her bosom, and promised to adopt me as her own. This chamber in particular recalls to my mind the lovely countess. It was here she used to devote her mornings to her little family;

mily; it was here I saw her for the last time."

Herbert, affected by the recollection of his youthful happiness, and by the uncertainty respecting the friend of his childhood, paused, to check, if possible, his feelings. The tears of Virginia recalled his self-command. He turned hastily towards her—he took her hand, and pressed it with enthusiasm to his lips. Again he besought her pardon for intruding on the sacredness of her retirement.

Virginia felt but little inclined to withhold it from one who had in his boyhood been so great a favourite with her lamented mother. Smiling sweetly through her tears, she confided to him the state of her own feelings—spoke of the maternal kindness of Miss Meredith with gratitude—recapitulated all that she had suffered by being estranged from her father's arms—dwelt with romantic energy upon the sisterly love which subsisted between her and Marian Glendore—then changed the subject,

subject, and described her delight on being introduced to Mrs. Herbert, and her immediate solicitude to become estimable in her eyes. In short, Virginia, in the openness of her soul, seemed to forget that Arthur Herbert was only the acquaintance of a few weeks. He was once the adopted son of her beloved mother, and she felt as if she could have entrusted to him every incident of her life. She led him over the apartments, showed him the trifling articles she had collected, and felt an indescribable satisfaction in knowing that he entered strictly into her feelings, and that his tears, mingling with hers, was a tribute of tenderness to the memory of her mother.

Herbert, enraptured by this proof of innocent confidence, and melted by the remembrance of his early friend, and of what might have been the probable consequences of their being brought up together, supposing that she was actually the daughter of lord de Morville, could

not restrain his sentiments. He flung himself on one knee before Virginia—"Here, in these sacred chambers," he cried, "exclusively belonging to my beloved, my ever-to-be-lamented countess, whose sainted spirit perhaps at this moment bears witness to the purity of my heart, deign, lovely Virginia, to accept my offered friendship. Think not of my sex, or of my youth; but should you ever require the assistance of a steady, a devoted friend, remember that my fortune is at your command—my services are yours. For the sake of her whose glory it would have been to promote my welfare, accept my offered heart. I ask not yours, Virginia; I only ask your unreserved confidence, should circumstances occur in which I can be useful to you."

Virginia, touched by his earnestness, entreated him to rise, assuring him that both her brother and herself would always be happy to rank him as their best and dearest friend. As a further proof of her
 esteem,

esteem, she called his attention to the little drawer of the mirror; and on her expressing some anxiety to have it opened, he instantly ran to the dressing-room of his mother, and returned with a small bunch of keys, one of which unlocked the drawer without any difficulty. On opening it, the first thing which Virginia perceived was a little parcel, directed—“ *To my dearest Arthur, for a birthday present, from his adopted mother, M. V. de Morville.*”

Her daughter instantly gave it into the hand of Herbert, saying—“ This must have been intended for you—accept it now as the gift of an affectionate sister.”

With religious veneration Arthur received the paper. It contained a green silk purse, with some curious coins, and a gold seal, with the impression of a laurel leaf; the motto—“ *I change but with death;*” which the countess had meant to bestow on her favourite on his natal day.

Notwithstanding the distance of time

which had elapsed, Arthur viewed them with filial reverence. His eyes now glanced towards the open drawer, and they rested on a note, which seemed to have escaped the observation of Virginia, who was busily engaged in picking out some beads of singular workmanship, which belonged to a necklace. The drawer also contained, as she hoped, several little ornaments. Among them was a diamond brooch, with the names of her brother and herself engraved on the back. She therefore doubted not but that the hair was theirs, and that the brooch had often been worn by her mother, with all the tender affections of a parent.

She now collected together whatever was valuable to shew her brother; and, turning towards Herbert, was shocked to see him deathly pale, with every appearance of extreme faintness. He however seemed to recover on witnessing her terror, and they quitted the apartments; Virginia having first requested him not
to

to mention to her brother that she was studying the harp. Arthur retired to his own chamber, and Virginia to seek lord de Morville in the library.

CHAPTER VI.

WHILE the attention of Virginia had been directed towards the contents of the drawer, that of Herbert was solely fixed on the note. The direction he knew to be the hand-writing of his father. Every limb of him trembled with agitation, lest Virginia should thus suddenly become acquainted with an intimacy which would destroy her peace. He felt himself as if he was on the rack, until he saw her close the drawer, and leave the apartment, without having examined the fatal paper.

It must be obtained at every hazard,

and that immediately; yet how was he to gain admittance to the bedroom, for Virginia had taken with her the key of the antichamber? it however occurred to him, that the private staircase which he had seen in his wanderings might lead to these rooms, and he therefore determined to seek it.

With a palpitating heart he gained the top of the spiral staircase. He was right—it once more conducted him to the apartments of the countess, but no door was visible. He sounded the wainscot, and discovered a sliding pannel, which was concealed by the tapestry, and which easily admitted him into the bedroom of his early friend. In an instant his hand was on the drawer of the mirror—he hesitated and trembled—by what authority was he acting?—was it honourable to steal, like a thief, into the private apartments of the countess, and to possess himself of her secrets? Yet the motive, surely, would excuse the deed, since it was to preserve the

the

the pure mind of her child from the dreadful idea of a parent's guilt that he thus violated the sanctity of the place.

Herbert was not long in regaining his own room. He could not as easily decide upon the propriety of perusing, as of obtaining, the billet of his father, though his inclination to do so made him readily frame excuses for the occasion. It is true his father had given him permission to apply to Mr. Glendore, should his own happiness require it. Might not this letter render the application wholly unnecessary, and explain the mystery of the miniature? might it not also prevent his yielding to an attachment which appearances inclined him to think was criminal? in this light he ventured to open the letter of his deceased father. It was as follows:—

“ MY DEAR AND EVER-BELOVED FRIEND,

“ The conversation of the earl to-day at dinner renders it impossible for

me to remain another night in his house. I rejoice now that I did not bring the children with me. I am at a loss to divine the cause of de Morville's singular behaviour, as my own heart acquits me of intentionally giving him cause for it. How I lament the indisposition which has confined you for these two days to your room! friend of my soul! dear adopted mother of my adored orphans! I cannot quit the castle; perhaps for ever, without bidding you adieu. Admit me for a few minutes, I entreat. I have that to communicate which I dare not trust to paper.

Your grateful and affectionate friend,

ARTHUR."

By the date of this letter it appeared to have been written six months prior to Mr. Herbert's setting out for India. There was nothing in it which could criminate the countess, nor authorize her favourite to suppose that an improper attachment subsisted

subsisted between them. Yet the breast of Arthur continued tortured by doubt and fear. The mystery of his parent's solemn bequest still remained unexplained. He wished now that he had suffered the note to remain; but, upon reperusing it, it occurred to him that Virginia's inventive mind might find something to work on, which his, perhaps, had overlooked; and he resolved to retain the note, thus guarding against the possibility of her delicacy being wounded by any part of its contents.

His reflections were disturbed by the arrival of the post, and by a summons to attend his mother-in-law, who had received letters from Meredith House. He found her considerably agitated by the intelligence which Mrs. Glendore had communicated to her, who at the same time assured her, in the most solemn manner, that she was totally ignorant of the young people's intention; but that she hoped Mrs. Herbert would not attach any blame

either to herself or any part of her family, except the beloved delinquents. In short, Reuben and Dorinda had gone out one morning to call on lady Lambton; but, in reality, they had eloped for Scotland. Mr. Glendore had pursued them, but not in time to prevent their union.

Herbert, though greatly surprised, as well as hurt by the want of confidence and respect his sister had shewn to the most affectionate of mothers, nevertheless rejoiced that she had chosen as the companion of her fault a man endowed with the many amiable and endearing qualities for which Reuben Glendore was famed. This also afforded consolation to Mrs. Herbert. She soon forgot the insult offered to herself; and since the child for whose welfare she had been tenderly anxious from the hour in which she became her mother, had thought fit to dispose of herself for life, without even paying her the compliment of asking her advice in an affair of so much magnitude, she thanked Heaven that

that her choice had fallen on Reuben Glendore. The letter of Reuben's mother she gave into the hands of Arthur, but took no notice of that which she had received by the same post from his father. She sat down to answer them immediately, generously wishing to tranquillize their minds as soon as possible. She assured them of her entire approbation of the match, as far as regarded the object selected by Miss Herbert; and only regretted that her daughter should have thought it necessary to use any concealment where her own happiness was at stake.

Arthur had taken the opportunity to retire, that he might peruse a letter from Alicia. It was full of romantic sentiment, as well as full of fears, lest the imprudent conduct of her brother should weaken the friendship he had manifested for her family; yet she implored him, by that friendship, to make an allowance for what had happened, and to forgive an action which

arose

arose from the excess of Reuben's affection for Dorinda. She dwelt on the insipidity of the country, now that she had lost the delightful society of Mrs. Herbert and himself, as well as the loss they all sustained by the absence of Virginia and the Merediths. She concluded by begging to hear from him immediately, as she was miserable until assured of his continued esteem, and anxious also to know what effect the marriage of her brother would have on Virginia.

This last anxiety was far from honourable to the heart of Alicia; it arose from curiosity, not from affection. After the departure of her father's guests, she and her mother had used every artifice to work upon the feelings of Reuben, till at last they ultimately succeeded in bringing about the completion of their wishes. Reuben offered himself to Dorinda, who consented to elope with him to Scotland. A note left on the toilette of Miss Herbert, directed to Mrs. Glendore, gave the joyful

joyful intelligence of their flight. It communicated instantaneous delight to all, except Mr. Glendore and Marian. The former, in particular, was hurt by the conduct of his son, though he felt assured that Mrs. Herbert would acquit him of any knowledge of the affair, much less of having encouraged, without her approbation, the passion of Reuben, knowing, as she did, that his hopes had led him towards a far different object.

Marian, indisposed by the sorrow she could not wholly repress, for the loss of Virginia's loved society, became seriously unwell the moment her brother's sudden departure was announced to her. The possibility that it might blight the opening happiness of her friend, was alone sufficient to bring a violent fever on the gentle and affectionate Marian.

Virginia meanwhile, unconscious of the coming evil, was shewing her brother the diamond brooch and other trinkets, which she had found in the drawer of the mirror.

—"They

—“ They are yours, my dear sister,” said lord de Morville, “ as well as my mother’s jewels, which, if you will remind me of, shall be sent to town to be reset for you. They were intended to grace the person of my wife, when I get one; but I conceive that you have the best right to them. It is true that I am not very rich, yet I think I shall be able to present my bride with her wedding ornaments.”

Virginia embraced and thanked him for his fraternal kindness—“ If I am not mistaken,” she replied, “ this is not the first gift you have bestowed on me. Were you not the unknown friend who so generously provided me with a set of beautiful oriental pearls?”

“ No, indeed, Virginia; I have lately been too poor to spare the money they would cost, and I am already so confoundedly involved, that I should be unwilling to add to my debts. Until I come of age, I have not a hundred pounds to call my own. Do you think, Virginia,
that

that Mrs. Meredith would lend me a few thousands?"

"Mrs. Meredith!" exclaimed Virginia, laughing heartily; "mercy on me! I do not believe that she ever lent a guinea in all her life; or, if she did, she always took care to have security for double what she advanced. No, my dear brother, you must not look for any pecuniary assistance from my good old friend, Mrs. Meredith. I have every reason to imagine that she loves me better than any other human being; but if I was never to get a husband until Mrs. Meredith gave me a bridal portion, I fear that I should be compelled to remain single all my life."

"You are not serious, Virginia, surely? a woman who appears to possess all the social affections, and who enters so warmly into the distresses of others, cannot be the miserly creature you have represented her. I will, however, learn this very day what truth there is in your report—a brother of one of my servants has been killed by a
fall

fell from his horse, and has left a wife and five infants unprovided for; after dinner I will bring up the subject, and call upon the liberality of the old lady to relieve their necessities."

"Do so, my dear brother, and be satisfied that you will not get even a dollar from Mrs. Meredith; but she will, nevertheless, promise largely. Oh! I know so well the character of my venerable friend, that I could almost repeat to you the words she will utter. Many people have naturally concluded, from the kindness which Mrs. Meredith shows for Winifred, that she means to provide for her handsomely; but my dear friend knows that she has nothing to expect from her aunt, more than a bare allowance for clothes. Therefore do not deceive yourself, my brother, with false hopes. All your eloquence will be exerted in vain, if it is aimed at the purse of Mrs. Meredith."

Lord de Morville looked unusually
thoughtful.

thoughtful. He had conceived that little Winifred was to inherit all the personal property of her aunt; and as her features and manners were agreeable, he had trifled with her under that idea. He certainly was not in love with Winifred, although he esteemed her warmly; yet had he married her, she would have possessed as much of his heart as it was possible for him to bestow on any woman, except one, but *she* was beyond his reach. Marry he must—the state of his income was not sufficient to support his extravagance; his extravagance forced him to make his selection among the wealthiest; and he felt pained to learn from his sister what, if true, annihilated all hope of his making Winifred the future countess de Morville.

Clearing up his brow, notwithstanding, he smiled affectionately on his sister, as he put into her hand two ten-pound notes—“They are part of a small sum,” said he, “which I this morning borrowed from my steward, and will serve for present use.

When

When we are in town you shall be more liberally supplied, my love; for I must procure some money soon at any interest, as I shall not be of age until April. A fortnight has already passed of the month I design to stay here. In another you will be introduced, my dear Virginia, to one of the loveliest and most accomplished of her sex. I have disposed her heart to love you as a sister, and you will not withhold from her yours in return. At her house you will meet with all the fashionables worth knowing, and be ushered at once into the pleasures of London. Lady Derterville is the being, above all others, calculated to render your *entrée* into the world agreeable and fascinating. Not a week passes without her having one or two parties; and as you are fond of music, you will not only be enchanted by her masterly performance, and by the richness of her voice, but you will there see assembled some of our first vocal and instrumental performers."

Virginia's

Virginia's eyes sparkled at the prospect of a treat so consonant to her taste, and she thought that lady Deterville must be a most charming acquaintance. Her heart danced with delight, as her busy fancy ran over the fairy scenes of promised bliss which were to be enjoyed at her house. What if Reuben Glendore thought her dissipated? might not his notions of women savour a little too much of the old school—and might not the mind and soul of lady Deterville be pure and uncontaminated, and yet be fond of worldly pleasures? had she not herself experienced the little allowance he was inclined to make for female thoughtlessness? had not the levity of a night been sufficient to break asunder the chain linked by love and friendship, and to extinguish the tenderness of years? could she then wonder that he should be severe on the conduct of lady Deterville? Yet Reuben Glendore was not apt to censure the actions of others; and perhaps even lady Deterville's had
 passed

passed unnoticed, but for his desire to warn her against yielding to the exuberance of her own spirits, which might lead, and had actually led her to the verge of impropriety. Determining therefore to keep in mind the friendly caution of him who, but for her own folly, might still, perhaps, have been her affianced husband, she gaily sought for Winifred, to whom she wished to impart the trial her brother meant to make of her aunt's charitable propensities.

CHAPTER VII.

Mrs. Meredith had also received a letter from Mrs. Glendore; its contents alarmed her for the repose of her fair charge, and increased her resentment towards the writer, whom she had not yet forgiven for her readiness to break the engagement which had once subsisted between her son and Virginia. The old lady's anger was, however, confined to Mrs. Glendore and Alicia; it did not extend to any other part of the family.

Winifred was not so just, or so nice in her judgments, as her aunt. She spoke with a warmth not usual to her, on the subject, and condemned Reuben equally with his mother; nor did she even wholly
exculpate

exculpate Marian—so much did affection for Virginia blind the eyes of Winifred.

With spirits light as air, and a countenance dimpled by the arch smile of anticipated mischief, Virginia joined Mrs. Meredith and her niece. The moment she beheld the expression visible on their features, she knew that no common occurrence had occasioned it, and her heart immediately ceased to throb with its newly-acquired rapture. Mrs. Meredith first informed her that she had heard from Mrs. Glendore, and that Marian was greatly indisposed.

This alone was sufficient to alarm the tenderness of Virginia, who began to lament the distance which separated her from the friend of her childhood, and the companion of her riper years.

“I think so highly of Marian Glendore,” said Mrs. Meredith, “that I am led to imagine her present illness proceeds more from disease of the mind than of the body. She is a very good young woman, and a steady

steady and affectionate friend. You cannot see her, my dear Virginia; but a letter from you, to assure her of your welfare, and your capability of bearing with becoming firmness the disappointments incidental to human nature, will do more towards her recovery than the prescriptions of her physician."

"You surprise me, my dear madam. I know of no disappointment which requires the exertion of my fortitude, or which can effect the spirits and health of my beloved Marian. Surely nothing has happened to endanger the life of Reuben?"

"No, not his life," cried Winifred, with bitterness; "but perhaps his honour and happiness."

"God forbid!" fervently exclaimed Virginia; "God forbid that any thing should interrupt the happiness of so amiable a being as Reuben Glendore!" Then recollecting herself, she tried to inquire with less warmth into the cause of their mysterious words.

Mrs. Meredith, with great delicacy and good management, communicated to her young charge the unpleasant intelligence of Reuben's elopement, exhorting her to exert herself on the occasion, and not to betray, either to lord de Morville or his guests, the effect it might have on her feelings.

Virginia listened to her with mute attention. The internal workings of her mind were alternately depicted on her changeful features. The struggle between pride and wounded tenderness was obstinate; the former however prevailed, and the blood once more crimsoned the lily of her cheek, as she raised her eyes to those of her old friend and protector.—“After what has passed,” said she, blushing still deeper from the retrospection, “I ought to have been prepared for such an event. Do not fear my prudence, dear madam; I am at present off my guard. I would not for the world that any one in this house, except you and Winifred, should

should suppose that I was attached to Mr. Glendore. With the origin of that attachment you are acquainted. The conduct of his family, and of himself, has contributed to weaken it; this last act of his has given freedom to my affections; and all that I now hope is to conceal from the world what we once were to each other. Yet I shall never be indifferent to his welfare. I wish him happy—oh, how happy——” Her voice faltered, and she burst into tears; but quickly recovering herself, she said—“ Do not reproach me for this weakness—it is my last. When we meet at dinner, I will neither disgrace the maternal care you have shewed for my education, nor shame the noble family to which I belong.”

Virginia rose hastily, and waving her hand to Winifred, who motioned to follow her, darted like an arrow out of the apartment, and shut herself up in her own, until the dinner-bell reminded her of the task she had to perform. It was

now that she found the necessity of disguising her feelings, and even of assuming a composure, a certain air of ease and indifference, to shield her from the observation of those with whom she was about to mix. The reflections of her leisure moments had been such as served to lessen the value of the flattery, which for years she had been accustomed to hear. Where was the power of that beauty which had been so highly extolled, if Reuben had so suddenly disowned it—if he could thus voluntarily give her up for a stranger? Yet that stranger, though plain in her features, was possessed of more solid attractions; she was mistress of FORTY THOUSAND charms; those of Virginia had faded before the golden beauties of Dorinda. Reuben was not surely forced into the marriage; it must have been an act of self will. Where then was the boasted power of Virginia's fascination?

Humbled, as well as wounded, by a shock for which she was then but little prepared,

prepared, Virginia had recourse to the natural pride of her disposition, as an auxiliary to guard her against the weakness of her heart; she called to mind every mortifying circumstance that had taken place since the discovery of her loss of fortune; and she drew an aggravated picture of those likely to occur had she entered into his family: the conclusion was favourable to her wishes; it taught her that she had little to lament, except the loss of Reuben's heart; and since he could so easily resign her, even that ought no longer to be a subject of regret.

Virginia had always worn, in a plain gold locket, a ringlet of Reuben's hair. Turning aside her head, she now consigned it to the flames. He was become the husband of Dorinda, and she felt the impropriety of retaining a gift bestowed on herself, when it was supposed that she would have been his wife.

Amy saw and wondered at the action; she knew to whom it belonged, but was

ignorant of the intelligence which had that morning been communicated to her mistress. When Virginia was a girl, she had often made one in the innocent sports invented for her amusement by Reuben; she had partaken of the pleasures arising from his mirthful disposition, and had frequently assisted him in his plans to surprise Virginia and his sisters. To know him was to love him, and Amy had always looked forward with grateful affection to the day which was to unite him to her young lady. What then was her horror on seeing his hair thrown into the fire! She instinctively rushed forward to its rescue; but a look from Virginia made her shrink back confusedly; yet it could not restrain the tears of vexation that fell on her cheek.

“Amy,” said Virginia, in a softened tone, and holding out her hand, which her favourite immediately raised to her lips; “Amy, in the course of to-day you will learn the reason of what you have just witnessed.

witnessed. Keep a guard on your lips, as you value my favour. Your own good sense, and your affection also for me, will teach you never again to bring up the name of the person to whom I now allude. Give me the diamond brooch which I found in the drawer of my dear mother's mirror. When I look on this trinket, it will remind me of one, who, had she lived, would never have abandoned me for another."

The blush of pride deepened the colour on her cheek, and restrained the rising tenderness of her bosom. She determined, for once at least, to act well the character of indifference, and hastened to the dining-parlour, where she congratulated Mrs. Herbert upon the marriage of Dorinda, with so much ease and vivacity, that Mrs. Meredith and Winifred could scarce believe the evidence of their own senses; while the amiable widow felt a secret pleasure in this proof, as she imagined, of the perfect freedom of Virginia's affections.

Arthur Herbert, who had been nervously anxious to witness the effect his sister's nuptials would produce on Virginia, carefully watched every movement of her expressive features; but no trace appeared of disappointed love, of mortified pride; her bright eyes sparkled with all their accustomed lustre; and he even heard her expatiate on the virtues and sweetness of temper of the man to whom he had been informed she had once been affianced.

From the contemplation of her loveliness, he was suddenly called off by his mother's fainting in the arms of lord de Morville, who fortunately stood near enough to save her from falling. She had been conversing with his sister, when her unexpected indisposition took place, which all present very naturally attributed to the agitation her spirits had undergone during the morning. A violent burst of tears seemed to relieve her, and the party sat down to dinner, a little discomposed
by

by the illness of one whom they all esteemed and loved.

Lord de Morville had, from the first day of his arrival at the castle, assigned to Mrs. Herbert the head of his table. He now conducted her to her seat, with every mark of respectful affection, to which she replied by a gentle pressure of the hand, and a look, that while it penetrated into the heart of his lordship, called the blood into his face, and occasioned every limb to thrill with pleasure. During the repast, he mentioned the unfortunate accident which had happened to the brother of one of his domestics, and the destitute state in which it had left his widow and infant family. Mrs. Herbert and Arthur immediately subscribed ten guineas. Virginia slyly slipped a couple into the hand of Winifred, who sat enjoying the changeful looks of her aunt, who began to tremble, lest she should be obliged to part with some of her money. Winifred, grateful to her friend for her timely supply, now

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tendered it to lord de Morville, to the no small surprise and terror of her aunt, who with difficulty kept silent, on viewing the extravagance of her niece, who she imagined had borrowed so large a sum, under the idea that she would not refuse to repay it, for so charitable a purpose.

“Here, my dear brother,” said Virginia archly, as she presented him with the same sum, “here is my mite; may it be of use to the unhappy object of your benevolent solicitude! Had I the noble fortune of Mrs. Meredith, I would imitate her example, and become the guardian angel of all that were unfortunate.”

All eyes were now turned on Mrs. Meredith, who became alternately red and white with anger and vexation.—“You have over-rated my merits, Virginia,” said the old lady, not, however, displeased at the compliment paid to herself. “I have always, to the best of my abilities, made myself useful to my fellow-creatures. Yet it is not by the indiscriminate giving of
money

money that their distresses are to be permanently relieved. My fortune was not always what it now is; my own frugality and economy have increased that left me by my beloved husband; but had I been extravagant, and thoughtless of the value of money, I should have lessened what he gave me, and ere now probably have stood in need of that assistance which you unhesitatingly bestow on a stranger."

"But, my dear madam, is not this stranger a widow with an orphan family, deprived, by the will of Providence, of her best protector, and left destitute of all comfort by his untimely death?"

"I will call on her to-morrow, Virginia," said Mrs. Meredith, "inquire into her case, and see what is to be done to relieve her and her children. By this means I may eventually render her more real benefit than were I to now give a few pounds, and then think of her no more."

Virginia cast a glance towards her brother,

ther, as she rose in silence from the table, and his lordship smilingly returned it, convinced now of the truth of her prediction; Mrs. Meredith had *promised* much, but she had *given* nothing.

When the ladies were retired, lord de Morville could not help observing to his companion what a singular character the old lady was, and repeated to him what his sister had said in the morning—"And yet," he continued, "who would give credit to her miserly propensities, that heard her converse so pathetically as she does on the miseries of human life? How is it to be lamented, that a woman whose manners, even at her advanced age, are still fascinating, and whose discourse is peculiarly sensible as well as entertaining, should dim the lustre of all her good qualities by her insatiable love of riches? Her precepts and example, however, do not seem to have closed either the heart or the hand of my sister; and yet is it not strange
that

that after so long a residence with such a model of penuriousness, she should have escaped untainted by its influence?"

"Not," replied Herbert, "when we consider the still stronger influence of hereditary virtues. Those of lady Virginia are natural, not required. The force of example, however strong, will never have power to repress the innate goodness of her disposition, or to damp the amiable ardour of her feelings. Mrs. Meredith, notwithstanding her unhappy inclination for parsimony, appears to me to be a very good preceptress for youth."

"I agree with you," said his lordship, "and really respect the old lady; although I regret that her fondness for that which she cannot carry with her to the next world, makes her careless of the happiness she might bestow on her relations, who are in want of what she hoards up with such religious care. I had some thought of asking Mrs. Meredith to lend me a few thousands, until I am of age, as I am con-
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foundedly embarrassed just now, and know not what to do to bring my sister out this winter with suitable eclat; but Virginia tells me that she does not believe that her old friend ever lent a guinea in her life. I purposely tried her to-day at dinner, and give up the cause as hopeless."

"I cannot regret it, my lord," replied Herbert, "since it affords me an opportunity of being serviceable to you. If your lordship will draw on me for whatever sum you require, I shall think myself happy in being allowed to contribute to your comforts, and to those of your lovely sister."

Lord de Morville, though surprised by so liberal an offer, nevertheless expressed his thanks in terms suitable to the occasion, and accepted it with gratitude. He accordingly requested the loan of three thousand pounds until he came of age; but Herbert, who felt an inexpressible pleasure in being thus enabled to perform a friendly action towards the children of his
beloved

beloved countess, gave the young lord a check on his banker for five thousand; telling him to make the payment of it perfectly agreeable to himself, and refusing to accept of any security.

Thus unexpectedly relieved from a part of his difficulties, lord de Morville gave a loose to his spirits, and in the openness of Lis heart confessed to Arthur that he had intended to offer himself to Winifred, had not the knowledge which he had gained from his sister of her want of fortune prevented him from ever thinking of her again as Lis future bride.

“ I care for money as little as any man,” said he; “ but the dignity of the peerage must be kept up, and my fortune is not large enough to portion off my sister, and to allow of my marrying a woman without one. Luckily, my dear friend, you are exempt from this bar to domestic peace; you can choose whom you list, unfettered by any such mortifying restriction.”

“ My

“ My lord,” cried Herbert, warmly pressing his hand, “ to be really considered by you in the light of a friend, is to realize *one* of my fondest wishes. You little think the interest I feel in all that concerns your repose. Perhaps you will smile at me, when I tell you that it proceeds from the recollection of circumstances connected with my boyhood; and that this castle to me is exceedingly dear, as being the scene of many a childish sport, when I was only eight years old, and your lordship could not be more than six.”

“ You surprise me, indeed,” exclaimed lord de Morville; “ and is it possible that we once were playfellows! surely this accounts for the friendship I immediately felt on seeing you: but to what can I attribute that powerful emotion which the sight of your mother never fails to call forth? to what but some act of kindness shewn to me in my infancy? The tones of her voice spoke to my heart the moment
I heard

I heard them, and, had I dared, I would have thrown myself at her feet."

"That is truly singular," replied Herbert, "as it is not likely that she ever saw you until lately. My father married her a short time previous to his leaving England. Your strange sensations can only arise from some resemblance, perhaps unknown even to yourself; but mine are easily accounted for, as the countess de Morville was the friend of my mother, who dying bequeathed me and my sister to her protection. A short, very short time, we remained under her roof, but long enough to impress on my mind a grateful sense of her endearments, and to imprint on my heart feelings which have never been weakened, even by my long absence from my native land. The partiality, my lord, which we felt for each other when boys, will now, I hope, be strengthened, since Providence has thus reunited us after so long a separation."

"Most fervently I hope the same," said
lord

lord de Morville. "Henceforward, my dear Herbert, let us consider each other as brothers. All the follies and weaknesses of my heart I am willing to lay open to your inspection—secure of your lenity for my mother's sake, if not for my own."

The blue eyes of Arthur filled with tenderness at this speech of his beloved playmate; while those of lord de Morville sparkled with all the magic brilliancy of his sister's—"Whatever the candour of your nature, my lord, may induce you to term a weakness, shall be held sacred by me—sacred as the memory of your angelic mother. By the remembrance of all her tenderness for myself, I entreat that you will not sacrifice the best affections of your soul for the sake of increasing your fortune. Unless you deceive me, I have already too high an opinion of your lordship, to suppose that you could be happy with a woman whom you did not love; and if Miss Meredith has made an impres-
sion

sion on your heart, do not allow the idea of her want of fortune to crase it."

The brilliant expression of the young lord's dark hazel eye, and the deep carmine of his clear brown cheek, now changed. He hastily swallowed a large bumper of Burgundy; yet Arthur, who had taken his hand, felt it tremble in his.

Passing the other rapidly over his forehead, lord de Morville again filled his glass. His lips moved, as if pronouncing some name; then turning affectionately towards Herbert, he said—"My brother—my friend! you merit all my confidence. The waywardness of my fate has decreed that I should love—nay, adore a woman who never can be mine. Yet, marry I must. I solemnly promised my dying father not to remain single. My heart is gone beyond the possibility of recovery; it matters not on whom I bestow the title of countess de Morville. Yet, since I cannot marry for love, it would be foolish, in my circumstances, did I not make interest
my

my guide in the choice of a wife. See!" he continued, drawing from his bosom a miniature of a lady set in large diamonds, "see! Herbert, the most convincing proof of my friendship, and of my confidence in your honour. After acknowledging my attachment to an angel like this, tell me, is it likely that I should ever so far forget her as to feel an affection for any other woman?"

"Upon my honour I think not," replied Arthur, his eyes fixed intently on the picture, the dazzling beauty of which for a moment fascinated his senses. It represented a lady, in the bloom of youth, clad in a vest of violet-coloured silk, which falling off her shoulders, discovered a bosom exquisitely formed, over which strayed, in luxurious ringlets, the dark tresses of her glossy hair. Every feature was perfect; the bright carmine of her cheek gave additional lustre to her jet-black eyes, whose melting tenderness bespoke a soul attuned to love.

Notwithstanding

Notwithstanding the witchery of her appearance, there was a something in the expression of her beautiful countenance that took from its innocency; and Herbërt, on recovering from the magic effect of her charms, could not help doubting of the purity of that mind which would permit a stranger's hand to delineate those beauties of nature, which should be kept sacred from every glance but that of a husband.

Fashion sanctions a hundred ridiculous customs; but that Englishwomen, once so extolled for the purity of their manners, the modesty of their looks, should unblushingly adopt the dress and levity of Parisian voluptuousness, was what Herbert could hardly credit. The delicacy of his taste revolted at such a shameless indifference to public opinion. He felt the unprotectedness of woman, even when shielded by prudence and reserve; divested of these guardians of her honour, and voluntarily exposing her person to tempt
the

the unhallowed passions of man, was it to be wondered if she fell a victim to her own imprudence ?

A disregard of decency, of feminine modesty, is the first step towards a corruption of the morals; and Arthur, as he returned the captivating ivory to his friend, secretly resolved never to make that woman his wife, whose innate sense of propriety did not prevent her from following slavishly those rules of fashion which endangered her principles, and consequently rendered her virtue at least doubtful.

The young lord passionately pressed his lips to the miniature, as he received it from Arthur—"Soon," said he, "you shall know the name of this lovely creature; but now we will join the ladies in the drawing-room. Remember, however, my dear Herbert, that I have not dared to drop a hint that my unhappy passion is returned."

CHAPTER VIII.

NEVER did the youthful scholar feel more delight at having conquered a difficult passage in Homer, than Virginia on gaining so complete a victory over her feelings. Mindful of the promise she had given Mrs. Meredith, she called into action her vivacity; by this means deceiving both her brother and Herbert, as well as greatly surprising her old friend and Winifred. But this exertion ceased as soon as she had retired to her chamber; and she wept unrestrained, as the idea crossed her mind, that Glendore, in ceasing to love, had also ceased to esteem her.

Too proud to remain long a prey to a weakness now become criminal, Virginia determined to collect together all the trifles
which

which had once belonged to Reuben, and to destroy them. To do this, she was compelled to visit the apartments of her mother, in order that she might obtain some music, which he had copied for her. Guided by the rays of a lamp, she proceeded to the southern wing of the castle. The music she was in search of stood open on the desk—it was a favourite song of Reuben's, and one which Virginia took particular pleasure in practising. It was the last time the notes would meet her eye; instinctively she seated herself at the harp, and struck its chords—it was the last time she would allow herself to play it; but now, alone and unheard, she could not resist the desire of once more singing the following stanzas, set to music by Reuben:—

“ Her image who enslaves my mind,
 Urge me no longer to discover;
 Fain would I sing, but ah! I find
 The bard can ill express the lover.”

She paused, and wiped away her tears. It was a song that Reuben used to sing to her and Marian. She thought she heard the echo of the deep-drawn sigh which she could not check—it must be imagination, and again she struck the chords for the second verse—

“ Yet, trust me, he whose happier skill
For terms would ransack earth, air, ocean,
May find, perhaps, more wit at will,
But less of genuine emotion.”

A sigh, clear and distinct, seemed to come from the bedroom of the countess. Virginia started from her seat; terror paled her cheek, yet what had she to fear? it was not likely that any person had gained admittance to her mother's apartments, as she always kept the keys, except when she entrusted them, for a short time, to Amy, to get the chambers in readiness for her reception: it must then only proceed from her disturbed imagination; yet she

moved towards the place whence as she thought the sound proceeded.

Raising the lamp, she cast a timid glance round the room. The sound of light retiring footsteps met her ear. That part of the chamber where stood the bed of the countess was yet involved in shade, but Virginia plainly perceived the semblance of a female form flit past the foot of the bed, and disappear as if by magic. Fear took possession of the soul of Virginia. It might be the spirit of her deceased parent come to chide her daughter for giving way to an improper tenderness. Her limbs trembled, the lamp fell from her hand, and she sunk fainting on the floor.

In this situation she was found by her faithful Amy, who, wondering at not being summoned as usual, had ventured to enter unbidden her young mistress's chamber. Not finding her there, she hastened to the southern wing, and to her surprise and grief discovered her senseless on the ground.

Virginia

Virginia recovering, cast a look of terrified inquiry round the apartment, and then on Amy. "How long have you been here?" said she, hoping to find that the figure which had caused her so much alarm was that of own maid. The reply of Amy, however, convinced her to the contrary, and she quitted the southern wing of the castle, thoughtful and dispirited.

In the morning lord de Morville took the first opportunity to inform her of the unexpected relief afforded him by Arthur Herbert. "By Heavens!" said he, "I scarce know how to prove to him my gratitude for the handsome manner in which he tendered me his assistance. I wish not to take from the merit of the action, but I cannot help thinking that I am in some measure indebted to you. Love for the sister made him doubly generous to the brother. Nay, blush not, Virginia; search among all the young men of fashion of the present day, you will not find one capable

of eclipsing my friend Herbert in personal attractions; and as to fortune, why, girl, you will be richer than many of our peeresses."

Virginia did not evince any displeasure at this conjecture of her brother. She joined in praising the kindness of Arthur's conduct, but attributed it to a different motive, namely, the filial tenderness and veneration he still cherished for the memory of their lamented mother. This naturally produced between them a conversation respecting the countess de Morville, and Virginia could not help reverting to the singularity of her father's behaviour towards herself. She remarked that there was a mystery which evidently hung over his cruel desertion of her. Had he loved her mother, it would have been impossible for him to have abandoned her daughter; but she trusted that it would one day or other be elucidated.

"Banish from your mind this useless hope," replied his lordship, affectionately
kissing

kissing her cheek. “Why do you wish to gain knowledge at the price of your tranquillity? Let the failings of our father, my Virginia, be held sacred by his children. I think I may venture to affirm, that whatever was the cause of his neglect, his own happiness was injured by it; and since you have not suffered, my dear sister, any very material injury by being exiled from home, think not of the past; let the future alone occupy your mind; it holds out to you every prospect of domestic felicity. In an union with Herbert, riches will be added to affliction, and you will, in that case, become the daughter of that charming woman his mother-in-law, for whom I feel the most lively regard. Once, Virginia, I feared that circumstances had conspired to ripen into a warmer sentiment the friendship you professed for Mr. Glendore; I rejoice that my fears were groundless. He has got a valuable prize; the duplicate I hope remains for you to accept of.”

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“Reuben Glendore,” said Virginia, “is worthy of his good fortune. May the woman of his choice prove equally so of him!”

On quitting the library, Virginia proceeded to the southern wing, to practise on the harp, as was her usual custom. She had scarcely touched its chords when a gentle tap at the door made her rise hastily from the music-stool. It was Herbert, who respectfully begged to be admitted.—“As the adopted son of the amiable countess de Morville,” said he, “I claim the privilege of entering these apartments.”

Virginia found it impossible to refuse him, yet she felt the colour deepen on her cheek, as he pressed her hand on leading her to the seat which she had just left.

“I feel too much the value of your ladyship’s condescension,” continued Arthur, still retaining the soft white hand of Virginia in his own, “to trespass often on your privacy; but it occurred to me, that as you are so anxious to make
some

some progress on this delightful instrument, unknown to your brother, I could, if you would permit me, provide you with an instructress, who would be happy to teach you all she knows—I mean my dear mother. I am certain that she will enter into your wishes with heart and soul, if you will allow me to confide to her your secret. She is mistress of the science, and you may learn sufficient in a fortnight to surprise and please lord de Morville.”

Virginia thanked him for his considerate kindness, and accepted of his offer with delight. In the openness of her heart she communicated to him the singular appearance which had terrified her the night before, and for which she was unable to account. Herbert seemed to listen to her with great attention, but when she had finished, he attributed it to the power of imagination; to this, however, Virginia would not assent.

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saw to be the effect of a distempered brain. I am not apt to be superstitious, and certainly last night felt less so than usual. My mind was occupied solely by one subject. I heard distinctly the sigh I breathed echoed back again, and, upon searching for the cause in the bedroom of my mother, I plainly saw a female form pass across that part of the chamber which was nearly in shade, and disappear as if by enchantment. My weakness rendered me incapable of following the figure to the spot where it appeared to vanish; but I intend this morning to look diligently over every part of the old tapestry, lest it should conceal some private opening into the room, which, as I mean to inhabit it when next I visit the castle, I should not choose to remain insecure."

Herbert immediately recollected the sliding pannel, and had no doubt but that the form which Virginia had seen was, like himself, an inmate of this world. His curiosity, however, was excited to learn the

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the source of Virginia's uneasiness, and he could not help inquiring what could occasion a sigh from a bosom which he had hoped was so free from care. Virginia, blushing at the remembrance, thought it prudent to reply that the illness of her beloved Marian was a sufficient ground for her being unhappy.

"I am satisfied," said Herbert, venturing to imprint a kiss on her hand. The ring which he had given her met his eye, and a sensation of rapture made his frame tremble, and his fine blue eyes beam with even more than their usual tenderness.

The words of lord de Morville recurred to the mind of Virginia, and she felt instantly assured that she was beloved. The idea was soothing to her habitual pride, and to her wounded feelings; and the prospect of convincing the Glendores that she still possessed sufficient charms, though robbed of those which fortune creates, to gain a conquest by them considered as invaluable, added to the brilliancy of her

eyes, and the beauty of her lovely countenance. She suffered him to retain her hand; her heart throbbed violently through the cambric which shaded her bosom, and pleasure made her tremble equally with Herbert.

“ I had feared,” said Arthur, lifting his eyes to hers, “ that notwithstanding your acknowledged affection for Marian Glendore, another cause might exist to render the unexpected intelligence of yesterday doubly distressing.”

Virginia understood the allusion. “ Surely,” cried she, with vivacity, “ you cannot suppose, Mr. Herbert, that I am such a miser in my friendships as to regret that good fortune has smiled upon one of my childhood’s companions, merely because it will rob me of his society. I should be unworthy the esteem of my beloved Marian, did I not rejoice at whatever is conducive to the happiness of her brother.”

“ Lovely Virginia !” exclaimed Arthur, “ I dare not disbelieve you ; my own peace
is

is too intimately connected with your assertion for me to doubt its veracity. I no longer disapprove of my sister's choice ; on the contrary, am glad that she has had the good sense to prefer real merit to splendid birth, and to bestow her hand and fortune on so worthy an object as Reuben Glendore. My dear mother's sentiments are in unison with mine. We only feel hurt that Dorinda should have thought a journey to Scotland necessary towards the attainment of her wishes."

" Perhaps," replied Virginia, smiling archly, " Miss Herbert was advised to act as she has done. I know how strict Mr. Glendore's ideas are on the delicacy of a woman's conduct, and conjecture therefore that they could only be over-ruled by the all-powerful opinion of some one of his family."

" You think then that Mr. Glendore is governed by his family? I should be uneasy if I thought that their influence would be stronger than that of my sister. She

has been educated with an indulgence that would not brook any interference on her right. Dorinda's happiness must be secured by the passive goodnature of her husband; the slightest contradiction on his part would make her miserable."

"Alas!" thought Virginia, "and is Reuben destined for ever to remain a slave to female caprice?" Then, recollecting herself, she said—"The peace of your sister, my dear sir, could not have been entrusted to one more capable of rendering it permanent than Mr. Glendore. As a son and brother he is unequalled. The affliction he feels for his family has induced him to yield to them in every thing. It is not likely, then, that he should oppose the wishes of her who must be to him still dearer than even his mother and sisters. Fear not then for the happiness of your sister; I have known him from a girl, and pledge myself that he will make one of the best of husbands."

"Amiable enthusiast!" cried Herbert,
fixing

fixing his expressive eyes tenderly on the changeful face of Virginia. "If you advocate thus warmly the cause of friendship, what would you do if influenced by love?"

"I am incapable of forming a judgment on that point."

"Then you have never yet experienced its power. Oh, lady Virginia! sixteen summers have passed away since you first blessed the heart of a mother by your presence. The sensibility of your nature tells me that you have either loved, or fancied so. Am I not right?"

"Do you think, Mr. Herbert, that I shall choose you as my father confessor, and expose to your scrutiny all the weaknesses of a heart as yet too young and inexperienced to fix faithfully to one object? No, no, I would not even now employ my time on a subject of such little value, did I not feel, that, as the being whom my dear mother, had she but lived, would have taught me to esteem as my brother,

ther, you have some right to question the conduct of your adopted sister."

A sound more ominous could not have passed the ear of Herbert; it paled his cheek, and robbed his eyes of all their sparkling lustre. He dropped the hand of Virginia, and, rising from his seat, proposed to assist her in her intended search. Guided by his secret knowledge, the sliding pannel was soon discovered to her, and she ceased to feel surprise at what she had seen, since it was most probable that the figure which had so much alarmed her was that of one of the maids, whom curiosity, more than any other motive, had probably led to take a survey of the countess's apartments. At her desire Herbert made them secure from any similar interruptions, and then left her to reflect on the conversation which had passed between them.

Virginia felt but little disposed to practise that morning. Her spirits were too fluctuating to settle to one pursuit, and she

she therefore returned to the drawing-room, where she found Winifred reading. At her approach she laid down the book, and forcing a smile, expressed her pleasure at being thus unexpectedly joined by her friend, whose secret studies had robbed her of her society. Virginia loved Winifred sincerely. This was the first time since their residence at the castle that she had complained of her absence, and Virginia, softened by the pensive expression of her hitherto-cheerful countenance, affectionately embraced her, and not only confided to her the cause which had so deeply engrossed all her mornings, but likewise the conversation which had passed between herself and Mr. Herbert, as well as the wishes uttered by lord de Morville for their union.

Winifred, the warm and steady friend of Virginia, heard her with only silent attention; she seemed to have lost all her spirits, and tears started into her eyes at the mention of lord de Morville's name.

Virginia

Virginia tenderly inquired the reason of a conduct so unusual. She did not feel offended, because she saw that Winifred was unhappy, and that had always the power to disarm the anger of Virginia.

Miss Meredith knew the heart of the lovely inquirer; she was sure at least of her sympathy, and, with tears, blushes, and entreaties of secrecy, confessed her attachment for lord de Morville, and that a sudden change in his manners within the last few days had made her miserable, lest she had committed some fault which would deprive her of his esteem. Virginia soothed and comforted her afflicted friend, with all the genuine tenderness of a feeling mind; but she attempted not to lull her sorrow by throwing out any hints, however trifling, that her brother was disposed to return the affection of poor Winifred. On the contrary, she lamented, in the warmest terms, the sensibility of her friend, and the limited state of his lordship's

ship's income, which would be a bar to his yielding to the disinterestedness of his natural disposition.

"I assure you, my dear girl," said she, "that the idea of adding to my brother's expences will be one great inducement with me to marry sooner than I should otherwise do. His kindness will not allow him to let me want any thing necessary for my rank, and I fear that, like most young men, he has been too extravagant, for he has confessed that he is greatly embarrassed, and, but for the noble generosity of Mr. Herbert, would have suffered very considerably this winter."

Winifred wrung her hands in all the wildness of hopeless grief. "Oh, Heaven!" she exclaimed, "had I but a part of my aunt's useless wealth, with what rapture would I appropriate it to his service! Alas! alas! who knows but, possessed of that, his lordship might then deem me not unworthy to become his wife! Fool that I was to suffer myself to be deluded
by

by false hopes! I ought to have known that Winifred Meredith, portionless, and dependant upon the charity of a penurious old aunt, who values her money more than the welfare of human beings, was not a fit match for lord de Morville; and yet, dearest Virginia, I know not why, but I felt a preference, if I may so term it, for your brother, even before I had seen him. You remember that I started the idea that the pearls were sent you by him, and I no sooner beheld his lordship than he verified all the visions of my fancy."

"I perfectly recollect it, my dear Winifred, but you will be surprised to hear that my brother disclaims all knowledge of them."

Winifred dried her tears, yet still they trembled in her eyes. "You do indeed surprise me, my friend. I always thought that the pearls were the gift of lord de Morville. They must come from the Herberts. I should not wonder, after all, if the same hand which bestowed the en-
vied

vied bouquets gave to you those beautiful ornaments."

"They are too valuable a present for me to receive from a stranger," said Virginia, thoughtfully ; " I will not wear them again until I ascertain the fact."

The entrance of lord de Morville made Winifred painfully embarrassed. A tear still rested on her crimson cheek, while his lordship, in accents of friendly solicitude, inquired if she was unwell. His sister immediately framed an excuse for the confusion of Winifred, and then left them together, thus giving her brother an opportunity, if he liked to make use of it, of allaying the uneasiness his change of manners had occasioned Miss Meredith.

When they all met at dinner, she saw, with good-natured satisfaction, that the smile of cheerfulness again dimpled the mouth of her friend, and felt pleased that if her brother had offended, he at least had again evidently made his peace with Winifred.

Mrs.

Mrs. Meredith had called on the poor woman whose misfortunes had been alleviated by the timely assistance of all present, except herself. She talked largely of what she proposed to do for the family, promised to send a couple of the boys down to her estate in ——shire, and even went so far as to advise the young ladies to make the younger children some clothes out of their cast-off things. Virginia cast a glance towards Winifred, and smiled expressively. Hersmile was observed by lord de Morville, who, with a look of extreme gravity, praised the active benevolence of Mrs. Meredith, and hoped that his sister would follow so worthy an example.

Mrs. Herbert was no sooner informed of the wishes of Virginia to gratify her brother by studying in secret his favourite instrument, than she readily consented to devote a part of each morning, during their stay at the castle, to her improvement. Under such an instructress, Virginia's progress even surprised herself.

She

She seemed to catch from Mrs. Herbert a portion of that ardour which rendered her performance so masterly. Yet notwithstanding that this amiable woman appeared equally solicitous as her pupil to make her improvement in music as rapid as possible, and to initiate her into all the mysteries of that heavenly science, her health evidently suffered by the exertion she was obliged to make. Even the air of the long-deserted apartments had an effect upon her debilitated frame, and she had frequently scarce any power to call forth those sounds of harmony which enchanted the youthful and animated Virginia.

Sometimes Arthur was admitted to witness the advancement of the lovely student in that in which she had fixed her mind in attaining. His praise, though guarded, stimulated her more strongly to become worthy of her master; while the approbation expressed by Herbert visibly delighted his mother; and he perceived, though not without a sigh of fear, lest it should

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should be vain, that she sanctioned a tenderness which he attempted to repress, as often as occasion or opportunity called it into action.

A few days before that settled for their removal to London, Mrs. Herbert and Virginia were alone in the sitting-room of the countess de Morville. Her pupil had executed some beautiful pieces, with a nicety of touch and display of taste and judgment, that charmed Mrs. Herbert, who, kissing her soft cheek, assured her that she might now with safety make trial of her skill before her brother, for that she would answer for his opinion being the same as her own. "Let me bring him hither to-morrow morning," said Mrs. Herbert; "it is but fair that the discovery should take place before we leave the castle. If you wish it, I will continue my instructions in town, but I should not even now blush for my pupil, were she called on to perform in a private circle."

"Thus encouraged, my dear madam,"
replied

replied Virginia, gratefully, "I consent to your proposal, and hope that my brother will be satisfied with the motives of my secrecy. But how shall I thank you, to whom I am indebted for whatever merit I may possess?"

"I have a request to make," said Mrs. Herbert, confusedly, "which will appear singular; but you must not feel offended at me."

"Impossible!" cried Virginia, with all the energy of her nature; "I can never feel offended by a request from Mrs. Herbert."

"Tell me then, my sweet girl, how you became possessed of that diamond brooch which you now always wear, and for which you seem to have a particular veneration?"

Virginia instantly explained how she obtained it, and that, supposing it to have once belonged to her mother, she valued it more highly than any other ornament she possessed.

"In that case," continued Mrs. Herbert,
"you

“you will not object, perhaps, to an exchange. Come with me, and I will show you a trinket which may please you even better than the brooch.”

Virginia followed in silence to the dressing-room of Mrs. Herbert, who, opening a box of splendid jewels, took from it a locket, set round with sapphires, topazes, and diamonds, in the form of heart's-ease. Never before had any thing so beautiful met the eyes of Virginia, who could not withhold her admiration. Yet she hesitated to exchange her brooch, though she longed to become mistress of the locket.

“If you will accept of this in lieu of the diamond brooch,” said Mrs. Herbert, “you will confer on me no ordinary favour. It contains a lock of your mother's hair, and has often been worn on her bosom.”

Tears rushed into the eyes of Virginia as she beheld the bright chesnut ringlet which once adorned the head of her lamented parent. Casting a look of beseeching inquiry on Mrs. Herbert, she
said

said—"You must have been intimately acquainted, my dear madam, with my mother, to feel thus agitated, after the lapse of so many years. Perhaps you can best inform me of some particulars respecting her and my father. Perhaps, also, you know the cause of his singular dislike towards me."

Mrs. Herbert pressed the sweet girl to her bosom. She seemed almost breathless herself, and Virginia, returning her embrace, besought her not to exert her spirits too much; at the same time presenting her the brooch, which Mrs. Herbert passionately kissed.

Recovering in some degree her composure, the amiable widow apologized for the weakness which she so often betrayed before her young friend—"I fear, my love, that you will consider my conduct as strange; but I am subject to dreadful nervous affections, which at times threaten to bereave me of life. I shall not be able
 VOL. II. K tution

tution is too enfeebled to allow of any particular exertion; and as Dorinda is married, I can now with propriety enjoy the comforts of retirement, and pass the remainder of my days in tranquil seclusion. Willing as I am to give up all the allurements of this life, I shall not so easily resign the hope of occasionally being gratified by your company. When you are introduced, my dear girl, you will have little time to devote to a solitary invalid like myself; and yet I think I may reckon upon seeing you sometimes."

"Seeing me sometimes!" repeated Virginia, warmly; "ah, my dear madam! you know not my heart if you imagine that I could neglect one who I have reason to believe must have been dear to my mother. I know of no pleasure that would compensate for the loss of your society."

"Dear, dear Virginia!" cried Mrs. Herbert, fondly straining her to her breast, "may you always preserve this tenderness
for

for your mother's memory ! Some future day, when my strength permits, I may enter into a partial detail of her unfortunate destiny. Look not so grave, my sweet girl ; as yet you are ignorant of the various ills which may encircle the glittering coronet of a peeress, and plant thorns of remorse and unavailing sorrow in the downy pillow of the wealthy. The flowers of happiness are only budding to *your* view. You know not the canker-worm they may conceal within to blight their opening beauties. It is not from me, my beloved Virginia, that you shall learn to fear the smile of proffered friendship, or the vows of ardent love. I would not damp the unsuspecting confidence of your nature, by teaching you to suspect the sincerity of those with whom you will associate. Experience, with all its train of doubts and fears, too soon destroys the charm of a young heart, and I could wish you to enjoy all the innocent pleasures of the world, pure and alloyed. This locket

K 2

will,

will, I know, be sacred to you, as having once belonged to your mother. Let me have the gratification of seeing you wear with it this chain of emeralds for my sake. If you decline my gift I shall feel offended, and think that you love me less than you seem to do."

Virginia felt herself placed in an awkward situation. She disliked accepting presents of so much value from any but a relation, yet she was unwilling to displease Mrs. Herbert. No alternative was left her, and she therefore allowed her to place round her neck the jewels, rather than give pain to one who, since her residence at the castle, seemed to take every opportunity of evincing for her the most permanent and disinterested affection.

CHAPTER IX.

LORD de Morville felt his curiosity considerably excited by the request of Mrs. Herbert, that he would spare her half-an-hour if he was disengaged. It was increased as he followed her to the southern wing. "Rest here," said she, stopping in the antichamber; "I wish to have your opinion, my lord, upon a subject which concerns us both."

Immediately the tones of a harp met his ear, and a well-known melody was played by the invisible harmonist. Lord de Morville was still more surprised, yet he expressed his approbation of what he conceived to be the execution of Miss Meredith. Mrs. Herbert smiled exultingly,

and then conducted him to where his sis-
was seated.

It is needless to say that lord de Morville was highly delighted by this proof of Virginia's affection, as well as attention to his wishes, and thanked her kind instructress, in terms the most flattering, for the pains she must have taken to bring her so rapidly forward. Mrs. Herbert felt more than repaid for her trouble, by the consciousness of having given him pleasure, and, taking the vacant seat of Virginia, she ran over the chords with the hand of a master. Time, which had impaired the energies of her body, had not weakened those of her mind, or damped that genuine feeling which gave soul to her touch, and magic to her voice. She sung a short, melancholy air, in a style simple and unadorned, yet so chastely tender, so exquisitely pathetic, that Virginia wept, while her brother hung over his widowed friend with rapt attention, his
fine

fine features evincing, more than words, the painful pleasure which he felt.

Once only had lord de Morville met with one capable of equalling Mrs. Herbert. At those moments when he listened to the strains of youthful beauty, issuing from lips crimson with health; when he beheld a form beautifully proportioned, a cheek whose vivid bloom gave lustre to the melting softness of an Italian eye, and whose small and delicate mouth, half opening, discovered the pearly whiteness of its little, regular teeth—at those moments of dangerous contemplation, how different were the emotions which the same magic touch of the harp called forth in the heart of the young lord, from those he now felt on hearing the kindred excellence of Mrs. Herbert! Conscious that the cause would not bear even the scrutiny of his own mind, lord de Morville tried to divert his thoughts from the fascinating object which had taken possession of them, and again expressed his delight on being so agreeably

K 4

ably surprised as he had been that morning.

The harp, so long disused, was now brought from the distant chamber of the countess, and placed in the drawing-room, where Virginia again performed, to the no small satisfaction of Mrs. Meredith and her good-tempered niece. The old lady declared that she saw no necessity why his lordship should incur the heavy expence of a master. Virginia had a natural genius for music, which she had done her best to have cultivated ; and, having the kind aid of Mrs. Herbert, it would only be a wanton waste of money to call in any other assistance. Lord de Morville, however, could not think of his sister's continuing to engross so much of Mrs. Herbert's time, until that lady at length succeeded in convincing him that it would be doing her a favour, as it would ensure her the regular visits of her young friend—a gratification she feared she should otherwise but seldom enjoy. His lordship
felt

felt the impossibility of refusing any thing like a request of Mrs. Herbert, and therefore consented that his sister should call on her daily on their arrival in London.

Neither lord de Morville nor Virginia felt any reluctance to leave the castle. Its leafless woods and snow-covered paths afforded but little amusement to the former, accustomed, as he had lately been, to all the gaieties of town, while the heart of the latter throbbed with anticipated pleasures. Mrs. Herbert and her son took leave of them in Piccadilly, and the rest of the party proceeded to his lordship's house in St. James's Place. Here again, to the unspeakable satisfaction of Mrs. Meredith, lord de Morville requested her to consider herself at home; and as he was well convinced of her frugality, entreated her to order for his sister whatever she might deem requisite for her appearance in public.

This done, and his dress changed, his lordship hastened to inquire if the family of lord Deterville were come to town.

After enjoying a *tête-à-tête* of two hours with the young countess, he returned home in high spirits, and delivered to his sister a note from lady Deterville, written in a style which well accorded with the romantic feelings of Virginia. Her ladyship longed to see her, and would remain at home the whole of the next morning, to receive the visit of one whom she already loved and esteemed.

The sanguine mind of Virginia instantly felt assured, that in the captivating friend of her brother she should find a companion capable of supplying the place of her beloved Marian. She pictured to herself the endless round of pleasures which her society would afford, and in fact could neither eat nor sleep for thinking of lady Deterville. She even thought the hours longer than usual until the appearance of her brother's carriage, which was to convey her to the house within whose walls she conceived every charm to dwell.

At the foot of the stairs she was met by
the

the young countess, who embraced her tenderly, expressing, in the most flattering terms, the happiness she felt on beholding the sister of lord de Morville. She then conducted her into the drawing-room, which was fitted up with every expensive article of fashionable luxury.

“ My friend,” said the countess, holding out her beautiful hand to lord de Morville, who instantly raised it to his lips, “ how shall I find words to express my thanks for thus kindly introducing to me your lovely sister? I see, by the soul and sensibility of her features, that she is a being after my own heart. Dear lady Virginia, let me have the felicity of considering myself as your chief friend and companion.”

Virginia, who was perfectly fascinated by the beauty and affability of lady Derville, testified her delight at so flattering a request, assuring her that her brother had predisposed her heart to attach itself to her ladyship, and that her first vi-

sit had been paid to her, as she had not yet seen any of her relations.

A glance from the countess repaid lord de Morville. He rose, and led her to the harp, anxious that his sister should judge if his praise had been exaggerated. Lady Deterville knew what was passing in his mind, and with all the confidence of conscious superiority, sat down to the instrument, which she accompanied with her voice. Virginia stood entranced; she could have listened to the heavenly strains for ever. They ceased, and lady Deterville looked round to receive the applause she deserved. The enthusiasm of Virginia's character betrayed itself in the artless warmth of her expressions, and her brother was not a little gratified to perceive that she was likely to become the favourite friend of the young countess of Deterville. An early day was named for her ladyship to dine in St. James's Place, that she might be introduced to the
Herberts,

Herberts, and to Mrs. Meredith and Winifred.

More than an hour had passed away in delightful conversation, during which time lady Deterville was devising several plans for the amusement of Virginia, when his lordship reluctantly reminded his sister that it was proper they should now pay their respects to their uncle, admiral Sedley—"But," said he, turning to the countess, "how are you engaged this evening?"

On hearing that she was going with a select party to the theatre, he promised to look in before the play was over; then gallantly kissing her hand, was quitting the apartment just as lord Deterville entered.

His lordship was a little spare man, about five-and-fifty, with keen, penetrating, grey eyes, an aquiline nose, and a countenance altogether that bespoke a head well calculated to regulate and conduct the important affairs of the nation. He was a constant attendant at the house
of

of lords, and indefatigable in the discharge of his public duties.

With open hand he welcomed the return of lord de Morville to town, and congratulated him upon the recovery of such a sister, whom he immediately styled the rose of beauty. "Take care of her," said his lordship; "she is a jewel of the first water, whose lustre will attract the gaze of many a longing eye. Take care of her, de Morville; be both a father and a brother to her." Then taking the hand of Virginia, he pressed it respectfully in his, saying that he hoped to have the happiness of seeing her a frequent guest at his table. On learning the engagement of the countess, he promised to accompany her, if lord de Morville would excuse his leaving him directly after dinner. To this his lordship assented, and the earl then handed Virginia to her carriage.

During the drive to Manchester-square,
lord

lord de Morville asked an infinitude of questions, respecting the opinion of his sister concerning lady Dêterville, to all of which she replied in the most satisfactory manner. The elegance and splendour of the mansion, the beauty of its mistress, and, lastly, the interesting friendliness of the earl, were separately dwelt on by Virginia, with characteristic energy. Yet she could not avoid noticing the great disparity of years which subsisted between the earl and his lady. "I should always feel for him," said she, "the veneration of a daughter, but I could never love him as a husband."

Lord de Morville smiled—"You women are strange beings, Virginia. It is almost as difficult to unravel your meanings as it was to find out those of the sphynx. I however agree with you, that it is impossible for a young woman to love an old man; and though I cannot help esteeming the virtues of lord Deterville, yet I think he proved himself any thing but

but a Mentor, when he became the husband of a beautiful young woman under twenty. Lady Deterville is as amiable as she is lovely, but you know, Virginia, that she must venerate him as a father, instead of loving him as a husband." Virginia blushed unconsciously. and the carriage stopped at its place of destination.

Admiral Sedley was a real English sailor. He was one of the best men in the world; but he was not a fine gentleman. He no sooner beheld Virginia than he clasped her to his breast with an affectionate violence, which, while it flattered her heart, nearly deprived her of breath. He lamented that the state of his health had prevented him from travelling, or he would have seen her long ago. "But never mind, my little girl," said he, eyeing her from head to foot; "we have got you among us now, and the devil himself can't hinder me from being more of a father to you than your own ever was. Though he was my own brother, yet I must say he was
always

always a suspicious and gloomy tyrant. I never saw your mother in all my life, but I have some of her letters by me now, and I don't believe a word that was ever said against her. The truth is, she was too good for him, I always said so. But cheer up, my lovely girl; though your father cut you off with a shilling, you shall share with Ned and Bill what little I have got."

Then seeing that Virginia's face was wet with tears, he tenderly wiped them off, begging her not to be low-spirited, for that her brother was no chip of the old block; he would love her the more, he was sure, for the unnatural conduct of her father. He squeezed the hand of his nephew with confident pride, and expressed his hopes that they would stay and dine with him. Both his sons were with their ships, but he expected the arrival of the eldest every day. Virginia was delighted with the plain, honest character of her uncle, and readily consented to remain with him; but de Morville, anxious to see Herbert,

bert, excused himself, and hastened to the residence of his friend.

Mrs. Herbert at first felt hurt that his lordship was alone, but she no sooner heard of the nature of Virginia's absence, than she expressed her satisfaction at the reception she had met with from her uncle. She accepted of lord de Morville's invitation to dine in St. James's Place; not however without first inquiring who were to be his guests—"For," said she, "my health will oblige me to be quite a recluse this winter, and I am therefore unwilling to form any acquaintance which may cause me to regret the resolution I have adopted of neither seeing nor receiving company. I will nevertheless deviate this once from the rule I have laid down for my movements, in favour of lady Deterville, for whom I feel a degree of interest, in proportion to my belief that she may regulate the future actions of lady Virginia Sedley."

Lord de Morville thanked her for the readiness with which she had acceded to
his

his wishes, and then invited Arthur to go with him that evening to the theatre. The look which accompanied this request decided the reply of Herbert, who consented, provided his friend would remain and partake of what had been ordered for himself and his mother. Lord de Morville felt no inclination to excuse himself; notwithstanding that his mind, more prone to virtue than to vice, suggested to him that he was on the point of trying most effectually the extent and sincerity of Herbert's friendship.

His head and his heart were at war with each other, but he had already committed himself, and confided too much to the honour of his friend to recede with a good grace. In taking Herbert to the theatre, he intended to make him personally acquainted with the lady whose miniature he had shewn to him before they left de Morville Castle, and he now suffered some fears respecting what opinion he might form of both himself and the lady. Yet
to

to save her from even the shadow of reproach was the constant study of lord de Morville. He believed her to be innocent even from a guilty thought, and to have her purity suspected by his friend would be more galling to his feelings than any other circumstance.

“As they drove to Drury-lane, his lordship strove to shake off his uneasy sensations. “To-night, my dear Herbert,” said he, “you will most likely behold the beautiful woman whose picture you so much admired at the castle. I have confessed to you that I love her with a passion which precludes my ever marrying from affection; but my unhappy attachment is known only to myself and you. Never have I dared to breathe into her chaste ear a wish inimical to her spotless fame. She views me as a friend—a brother, and in that light allows me more freedom of conversation than to her common acquaintance. Pity my misfortunes, Herbert, but respect the cause.”

On

On their arrival at the theatre the eyes of lord de Morville eagerly ran over the company assembled in the boxes. In that belonging to lady Elizabeth Lester he discovered the object of his search. The colour deepened on his cheek ; every feature became animated as he returned her salutation. He desired Herbert to look towards the opposite boxes, and to tell him what he thought of a French marchioness, whose beauty had been as highly extolled in England as in her native country. Herbert obeyed ; the captivating foreigner, arrayed in all the voluptuous freedom of her birth-place, instantly met his eyes. Hers were directed to where he stood. At any other time the encouraging glances which both himself and his companion received from the marchioness, would have fixed his attention ; but that was now engrossed by a lovely young Englishwoman, who sat next her, and whom he immediately recognized as the
 lady

lady whose likeness he knew to be worn by his friend.

“ I think,” cried he, exultingly, “ that many of my fair countrywomen are far superior to the marchioness. Her beauty is even now eclipsed by the young lady whose jet black eyes at this moment rest on your lordship with an expression which, in spite of your modesty, proclaim you to be the envied possessor of her heart.”

“ You are mistaken, my dear Herbert,” hastily replied his lordship, in evident confusion; “ you will not say so an hour hence. I must introduce you to her; her character is dearer to me than life. She lives not for me. You admire her person, but when you know her, you will admire her mind.”

At the end of the act lord de Morville rose, and conducting him to lady Elizabeth Lester's box, introduced him to her, the marchioness, and lastly to the countess of Deterville. Herbert remembered the
name;

name; he felt awkward, and feared that he looked foolish. He heard his lordship speak of him as his dearest friend, and at length ventured to cast a glance to the lovely being, who, in a low, sweet voice, addressing him, expressed the pleasure she felt on seeing a person so highly esteemed by his lordship.

“ I believed this morning,” said she, in the same magic tones, “ that my happiness could not receive any addition, but I now acknowledge my error. This morning my amiable friend, lord de Morville, brought me a charming companion in the person of his sister; this evening he establishes another claim to my gratitude, by introducing to me his dearest friend. I hope you are both disengaged, and will have the goodness to return home with me and lady Elizabeth to supper. I am sure that the earl will be happy to see me so well attended.”

Lord de Morville and Herbert gladly availed themselves of her invitation. The
marchioness

marchioness was otherwise engaged, but lamented loudly, in broken English, the loss she should sustain by being compelled to quit such delightful company.

Arrived at lady Deterville's, they found the earl was not yet come back from the lords. An elegant little supper was served up in a small apartment, tastefully decorated with pictures from the choicest masters, and illumined by lamps of beautiful painted glass, which cast a mellow light over the surrounding objects. The air of this pleasing chamber was impregnated by the odour of a variety of shrubs, and to complete the scene, taste, good-humour, and delicate wit, presided at the table of lady Deterville.

The mortified surprise and vexation at first discovering that the object of de Morville's attachment was a married woman, by degrees wore off, as Herbert continued to listen to the conversation of the countess, and to observe, with a scrutinizing eye, the seeming innocence of her looks
and

and actions. He appeared to share her attention equally with his friend, and never, perhaps, had he enjoyed a meal with so keen a relish as the one of which he now partook. After it was concluded, they returned to the drawing-room. Lady Elizabeth ran her fingers over the harp, and invited the countess to take her seat.

Lady Deterville smiled on her friend expressively. Her smile seemed to say, I have charmed sufficient without the aid of music; yet she placed herself before it with a careless air. Her attitude *appeared* to be unstudied, but it was such as showed to the greatest advantage every graceful movement, every turn of her finely-proportioned figure. She raised her black eyes with magical effect to the countenance of Herbert; she talked to him with syren sweetness, as her white and taper fingers preluded on the harp; then, suddenly stopping, she began to sing in a voice so exquisitely pathetic, that whatever might be the secret feelings of

lord de Morville, those of Herbert were almost equally affected.

Lady Deterville paused, and casting a timid look towards the couch on which Herbert was leaning, seemed to inquire into his thoughts. Recovering himself from his delirium, if so it may be termed, Arthur found once more the use of his speech, and her ladyship was perfectly satisfied that if, at a future time, the friend of lord de Morville should not approve of all her proceedings, she had gained sufficient hold of his senses to ensure his lenity. She gave him a fascinating smile, and then called upon his enamoured companion to join her and lady Elizabeth in a lively trio.

To Herbert, who was fond of music, and an enthusiastic admirer of beauty, the time flew with the rapidity of lightning. Lady Elizabeth was young, handsome, and animated; she seemed as desirous as her friend to add to his amusement by a display of her talents; and it was not until his repeater had struck half-past one, that

that either himself or lord de Morville thought it necessary to quit the society of these captivating females.

No sooner was the door of lord de Morville's carriage closed, than he demanded eagerly of Herbert what he now thought of lady Deterville?

"I will tell you, my friend, to-morrow," replied Arthur, "when my mind has recovered its accustomed freedom. To-night my senses are spell-bound, and I am incapable of judging like a rational being."

Virginia, who had returned early from her uncle's, waited impatiently the arrival of her brother, to whom she longed to express her thanks for his handsome present of a magnificent harp, which Mrs. Meredith declared must have cost at least a hundred and fifty guineas. What a wanton waste of money! Yet it was to no avail that she railed at the extravagance of his lordship, or condemned the satisfaction displayed by her young charge, on finding herself mistress of such a splen-

did instrument. It was in vain also that she reminded her, that it would better become her to restrain the thoughtless profuseness of her brother, than to encourage it, by evincing her delight at what might have been obtained at half the expence second-hand. "I myself," said the old lady, "would have procured you a harp, little if any thing the worse for wear, and thus have saved his lordship nearly eighty pounds, a sum of money which would, with care, go a great way towards furnishing your wardrobe. I shall think very ill, Virginia, of your understanding, if I see any more proofs of such silly weakness as the one you have just given me. It is your duty to economise, as much as possible, the favours of your brother. He is not rich; be prudent, therefore, and do not encourage him to waste, lest you should bring him to want."

Virginia most seriously assured her that she did not wish to increase the embarrassments of her brother, but, on the contrary,

trary, regretted that it was not in her power to lighten them. She promised to be governed by her advice in all pecuniary matters, and thus obtained her pardon. On the return of lord de Morville, she nevertheless could not help praising the beauty of his present, though a look from Mrs. Meredith made her add, that she hoped, in future, he would be less costly in his gifts, as a plainer one would have been of equal service to her.

Lord de Morville examined the harp, and descanted upon the beauty of its ornaments, but positively denied any knowledge of the present. "I can guess," said he, "however, from whence it comes, and only wonder that among three females, the known sagacity of their sex has not assisted them to discover the generous and delicate donor of the harp. In good faith, my sister, it was my intention that you should have one, perhaps less splendid than this, because my fortune is more limited than that of my friend. He knows
 L 3 this,

this, and has therefore, with friendly zeal, anticipated your wants, and my wishes."

"Ah, my brother!" exclaimed Virginia, with unusual gravity, "to what will these obligations lead? How can I repay them?"

"By giving Herbert a legal right to bestow them, my dear sister. I know of no man on earth whom I should more earnestly desire for a brother than him; and by Heaven, if you get him, you will be a fortunate girl. He is all that woman can desire; and, what is of consequence in these times, he possesses that which will enable you to live with equal splendour to most of our nobility. Am I not right, Mrs. Meredith? Is not money absolutely essential to domestic happiness? and would not my sister do well to encourage the affection of my valuable friend?"

The cheek of Winifred was now paler than before.

"Certainly, my lord; I quite agree with you on this subject," said her aunt.

"Virginia is portionless, she has a high spirit,

spirit, and consequently must dislike to be dependant even on a brother for all the necessaries of life. She will not find many men like Mr. Herbert. He won my heart, that am an old woman now, the first time I saw him; and as to his riches, they are immense. I will venture to affirm, from what I have seen of his disposition, that he will make her a noble settlement, which I should hope her good sense, and the precepts and examples she has learned from me, will teach her to make a right use of. I was sadly afraid, my lord, when I supposed that it was you who had sent home that expensive instrument."

"Indeed, my dear madam, your fears were groundless. I shall be happy to become your pupil, if you will teach me the art of economy; and should therefore have given you but an indifferent specimen of my intentions, had I gone to so high a price as that which this harp must have cost."

"I think so truly, my lord, and told
Virginia

Virginia 'that I was certain I could procure one nearly as good, second-hand, for half the money.'

Lord de Morville did not very well relish the idea of any thing being brought into his house that was not new; but it was to his interest to allow the old lady to give way to her natural disposition, and to conduct, with the true spirit of frugality, the affairs of his household. Money saved was money put into his pocket; and he saw, with surprise and pleasure, the various articles which Mrs. Meredith had bought for his sister, out of a sum which he did not conceive would pay for more than half of them. He did not, however, know that the good management of the old lady had done more than this, and that she had actually marketed so well as to be enabled to purchase some dresses for her niece, out of what remained of the bank-note given to her by his lordship for the use of his sister.

The next day Virginia called on Mrs. Herbert,

Herbert, as well from affectionate solicitude to see her amiable friend, as to receive her promised lesson on the harp. She naturally mentioned the splendid present she had received the evening before, and her wish to discover to whom she was indebted for the gift. Her blushes, and the confusion visible in her manner, made her look particularly lovely in the eyes of Herbert and his mother. The latter suspected immediately who was the real donor of the harp—"Be at ease, my sweet girl," said she, "on the subject of your obligation; and rest assured that the person who conferred it feels as the obliged party, by your condescending to accept it."

Seeing that this speech only increased the embarrassment of Virginia, Mrs. Herbert kindly tried to divert her mind from what evidently gave her pain—"I have heard from Dorinda," said she, gaily, "and expect to have the pleasure of embracing her and her husband to-morrow. The
Glendores

Glendores will accompany them to town. Alicia is to be my daughter's guest this winter, as the physicians have ordered Marian to Bath, and the rest of the family mean to attend her there."

"Alas!" cried Virginia, in alarm, "I fear that my beloved Marian has concealed from me the real state of her health. This sudden journey terrifies me exceedingly."

"Do not allow it to make you unhappy," continued Mrs. Herbert; "it will most likely contribute to the restoration of her health and spirits—the latter I believe to be the primary cause of her indisposition. I have always suspected that the disease lay more in the mind of Marian than in her body."

"She is a character of uncommon interest," said Arthur, in a tone of friendly sympathy; "but the quickness of her feelings, and the keenness of her sensibility, will prevent her from ever being a happy one."

Virginia sighed deeply as she remembered

bered the fatal cause which, in all probability, was hastening her beloved Marian to an early tomb. Mrs. Herbert strongly expressed a wish that lord de Morville and his sister, with their guests, would pass the day with her, that they might assist her in making the reception of Mrs. Reuben Glendore as flattering as possible.

Virginia caught the eye of Arthur—it determined her reply—"I know of no engagement that either my brother or our friends have," said she, with a firm voice, "and therefore believe that I may promise for them. As for myself, I shall always be happy to testify my esteem for the daughter of Mrs. Herbert."

"And the wife of Reuben Glendore?" cried Arthur, looking intently on her lovely countenance.

"Surely—are they not one and the same being? but do not forget, my dear madam, that the day after you have consented to meet lady Deterville at my brother's; and I hope also that you will be able to prevail

prevail upon Mrs. Reuben Glendore to accompany you."

How far this wish agreed with the natural sincerity of Virginia's character, will be developed in a future chapter. Dorinda was now become a member of that family once so idolized by our heroine; she was the wife of Virginia's early companion—of the brother of her beloved Marian; and though that brother had formerly been regarded as her affianced husband, yet Virginia would not have felt the slightest dislike to Dorinda on that account. It was a certain something which is more easily felt than defined, which made her conscious that they were never intended to be friends. Neither did Virginia imagine that they should ever become enemies. Hasty in her own disposition, and perhaps too ready to take offence at a fancied insult, she was nevertheless incapable of hatred towards a fellow-creature, or of acting with premeditated ingratitude. What she objected to
in

in the general conduct of Dorinda, she attributed to female jealousy, as she naturally concluded that Alicia had informed her *bosom friend* of the situation in which she once stood with respect to her brother. Dorinda was now the wife of that brother, and Virginia good-naturedly hoped that she would, on that account, feel disposed to meet her with the same friendly sentiments as those which she in general displayed for her visiting acquaintance.

END OF VOL. II.

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